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The Mystical Kitchen: Feminist Magic and Alchemical Transformation in the Work of Lenora Carrington

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THE MYSTICAL KITCHEN: FEMINIST MAGIC AND ALCHEMICAL
TRANSFORMATION IN THE WORK OF LEONORA CARRINGTON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the College of Arts and Humanities
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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By

Theresa Burwell
Saint Charles, Missouri
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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: THE MYSTICAL KITCHEN: FEMINIST MAGIC AND ALCHEMICAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE WORK OF LEONORA CARRINGTON

Theresa Burwell, Master of Arts, 2025

Thesis Directed by: Jonathan Frederick Walz, Ph.D.

This thesis analyzes the inherent feminism in alchemical and magical symbolism, particularly in representations of kitchens in the art and writing of Leonora Carrington. The kitchen has historically been viewed as a gendered space for domestic work. By subverting cultural and religious conventions, Carrington's kitchen becomes a site for transmutation and feminine ritual. Using feminist discourse, formal art historical analysis, and the history of alchemical symbolism, this thesis asserts that Carrington's imagery transforms the kitchen from an oppressive domestic space to a mystical laboratory of feminine power. A thorough analysis of *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (1975) and *The House Opposite* (1945), as well as the latter's associated literary work of the same name, will establish the methods Carrington uses to reconstruct the kitchen and culinary imagery into emblems of the alchemical process and feminine power. Carrington blurs the line between the sacred and mundane by turning the kitchen into an other-worldly space and transforming the domestic into the mystical. By placing Carrington's kitchen imagery into feminist and alchemical discourse, this thesis adds to the current conversations regarding surrealism and feminism. This study argues that Carrington remodels the gendered domestic sphere into a space in which women's work is re-evaluated as spiritually powerful.

Keywords: Leonora Carrington, feminist Surrealist studies, alchemy, women in Surrealism, esoteric studies

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INTRODUCTION

Leonora Carrington's paintings *The House Opposite* (1945) (Fig. 1) and *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (1975) (Fig. 2) pull the viewer into a domestic space that is alive with ritual, magic, and transformation. Though the scene is grounded in the familiar setting of the kitchen, the paintings develop into a heavily symbolic visual language in which cooking becomes essential to alchemical processes and the search for spiritual knowledge. Embodied knowledge about cooking and food preparation acts as ritual and the kitchen as a laboratory of creation. The kitchen as a ritual space gives us a fresh look at the work of Leonora Carrington, whose art applies magic and power to domesticity. Through esoteric symbolism and mystical subjects, Carrington's kitchen rarely resembles the typical domestic interior. In this instance, "esoteric" would refer to the obscure and arcane knowledge found within the Western Esoteric tradition; these include alchemy, Kabbalah, hermeticism, and pagan philosophies.¹ Mystical refers to having qualities related to ancient religious or occult rites. Additionally, the occult refers to a category of esotericism that engages in supernatural beliefs or practice and magic as the practice of supernatural powers. Her works turn the act of cooking and ingestion into magical and alchemical processes of transformation. Her imagery often resembles the workshops of wizards and alchemists in their search for infinite knowledge. Through her paintings, Carrington expands the domestic sphere from a mundane and subordinate site to a realm of creative power that challenges gendered conventions. The goal of this study is to analyze how Carrington transforms the kitchen and domestic spaces as sites of resistance and subversion as well as a space for feminist alchemical transformation and creation. How does Carrington use domestic activities such as cooking, baking, and food preparation as analogous for alchemical and occult creative processes? In

¹ Antoine Faivre and Karen-Claire Voss, "Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions," *Numen* 42, no. 1 (January 1995): 48–77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3270279>.

what ways does Carrington transform the kitchen from oppressive domestic space to a powerful and subversive feminist space?

The House Opposite was created in 1945, two years after Leonora Carrington's relocation to Mexico. The Mexican Years would be considered a highly transformative era in her oeuvre and would lead Carrington to produce some of her most esoteric and feminist works. Art historian Whitney Chadwick indicates that this move would result in "a new pictorial language, one autonomous and grounded in female sensibility and knowledge."² This time would become an era of psychic healing for Carrington following the traumatic events that would lead her to flee from Europe including the arrest of former lover Max Ernst and a deeply troubling institutionalization in Spain. The 1940s would mark a period of transition and both personal and artistic. After emigrating in 1943, Carrington would go on to marry Hungarian photographer Emerico "Chiqui" Weisz in 1946 and have her sons Gabriel and Pablo in 1946 and 1948 respectively.³ Carrington would also find a deep sisterhood with fellow Surrealist artist, Remedios Varo. The two creative women shared an enjoyment of the Mexican culture, mysticism, and esoteric practices that had become popular within the Surrealist community. Carrington's experience leading up to her emigration and the years to follow would result in her Surrealist style incorporating more myth, magic, and domesticity reflective of the changes in her life.

Using egg tempera on panel, Carrington presents the viewer with a cutaway to an interior space, remarkably like a doll house, with activity occurring in various rooms or chambers in *The House Opposite*. There are five clear areas of activity in the scene, each with its own significance. In the upper left chamber, a tall figure in a light blue dress and long white hair holds a tree branch, a cat rubbing against her legs, while a figure in a green robe and a fish-tail headpiece kneels as a third woman floats

² Chadwick, Whitney. "Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness." *Woman's Art Journal* 7, no. 1 (1986): 40. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358235>.

³ Susan L Aberth, *Leonora Carrington : Surrealism, Alchemy, and Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 2010), 64.

through the floorboards into the scene below. Ghostly tendrils from the center chamber creep in through an arched doorway. The center room brings nature indoors through a spectral wooded scene. Carrington situates a rocking horse in the center of this room, a motif the artist has used in other works including *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)* (1937) (Fig. 3). Additionally, the chamber shows a young woman seated on the floor in a position indicative of grief or sadness as well as a figure above seated straight up in bed as though waking up from a dream. Another much larger figure that is part-human and part-tree completes the chamber. The lower left chamber is the largest area in the scene, a dining table acting as the focal point. Seated at the table, a woman in a red and blue dress casts a horse-shaped shadow on the wall while she eats from a bowl in front of her. Above her, the woman from the top left chamber swoops down into the scene. To the far left, a woman with tree-branches for a head materializes through the wall from outside and holds a mysterious gold bag in front of her. Three much smaller figures meander beneath the feet from the central woman. It is unclear what these little robed creatures are, but the way Carrington has portrayed the diaphanous edges of their robes indicates they may have recently materialized into the scene. From the right, a small woman or a young girl runs into the room holding up a nest with a blue bird like a serving platter. In the lower right portion of the painting, we can see four adult female figures, three of which surround a cauldron hanging from the ceiling, stirring a boiling green liquid. Chickens sit at their feet on a black and white checkerboard floor. One figure wears a starry cloak, reminiscent of the stereotypical garb of a wizard. The center woman wears a gold cloak while the left woman wears a red cloak, dropped to her shoulders to expose her breasts and dark skin. Of the three, the left figure has an animal-like head, like that of the central seated woman. The last figure in this chamber, wearing a long black cloak and red shoes, climbs an Escher-esque set of stairs that leads to the “outdoor” room. A ladder placed on the far-right side of the room leads the viewer upwards to the final chamber. A translucent red form climbs the rungs to a room with a four-poster bed and a window with a view of the night sky. There are small peeks of the area

around the interior space. Portions of a starry night can be seen above while a dark other-worldly pocket can be seen beneath the kitchen or ritual room. To the far left, a landscape can be seen that looks strikingly like those found in the backgrounds Renaissance portraiture or narrative scenes.

In *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (1975), Carrington has set up her own alchemical laboratory in a scene. Art historian Susan Aberth calls a “spectacular ode to magical cooking.”⁴ Jonathan Eburne refers to this work as “both an example of and a key to her mythic system.”⁵ On the right side of the painting, there is a doorway that leads our attention into a different space, possibly outside or into a different realm. There is a star illuminating the darkness and the shape of a ghostly figure can just barely be seen. In the center, a large round table sits in the middle of a sacred circle scrawled into the floor. The table is adorned with a variety of produce including corn, garlic, eggplant, peppers, and rose cabbage. Three humanoid figures stand at the table, one holding a large, curved knife, another holding what looks like tortillas, and another holding a bulb of garlic. In the foreground, another figure wearing a witch-like hat grinds corn into *maseca* or cornmeal while a figure in the back stirs a bowl and cooks tortillas. All five of these figures have their identities obscured using hoods and hats, their eyes large and deeply black. Each wears a different colored robe while also wearing the same red shoes. Most noticeable are the two animal figures on the right side of the painting: a larger-than-life-size goose and an anthropomorphized goat-like creature wearing a robe and holding a broomstick. The horned figure is evocative of an antelope, gazelle, or impala with its long curving horns and pointed face. The robe it wears is also adorned with embroidery or an emblem at the neck. Looking more closely, the embellishment has the same motif as the golden bag with a face that is seen being carried into *The House Opposite*: a small face surrounded by ruched material, giving it the

⁴ Susan L. Aberth, “The Alchemical Kitchen: At Home with Leonora Carrington,” *Nierika: Revista de Estudios de Arte* 1 (June 2012): 22.

⁵ Jonathan Eburne, “Breton’s Wall, Carrington’s Kitchen: Surrealism and the Archive,” *Intermediality* 18 (2011): 17–43, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1009072ar>.

appearance of an anthropomorphic celestial body. The figures of both the goose and the gazelle cast shadows on the floor in the foreground, indicating their corporeal presence in the room.

Carrington's color palette is bold and vibrant. While red dominates the piece, there are large areas of white and black with hints of saturated purples, blues, and orange. The work shows a group or a coven engaged in ritualistic food preparation surrounded by mystical symbols. One of the more striking elements of the image is the presence of the stark white goose in the center of the composition. Carrington places the goose along the edge of the sacred ritual circle, the three hooded figures staring raptly at it as though we caught the moment it was conjured. There is also a little puff of smoke or steam that surrounds the goose and dissipates into the air, indicating that magic was present in the room. At the foot of the table, a glass vessel filled with liquid and a small black cauldron sits among an ear of corn and a pepper that has been sliced open. The placement of the pepper in the circle and the way Carrington has rendered it splayed open with its contents spilled could imply that it is a sacrificed item as part of the ritual. Three cloves of garlic are seen placed at the edge of the sacred circle in even intervals which would imply that they are part of the ritual. One bulb is set on its side, upturned when the goose was conjured into the space. In the back left half of the painting, a giant black stove takes residence. Like the emblem on the gazelle, the stove features an embellishment of a face that looks strikingly like Celtic representations of "the Green Man," a foliate head motif often found carved in medieval churches though carrying ancient pagan roots associated with fertility and abundance.⁶

Biography

The fantastical works of Leonora Carrington show the viewer the unique and mystical world of the artist, revealing chimerical creatures formed from the parts of various animals, sacred geometry that evokes divinity in certain configuration of shapes, and magical rites drawn from a variety of mythical

⁶ R. O. M. Carter and H. M. Carter, "The Foliate Head in England," *Folklore* 78, no. 4 (December 1967): 269–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.1967.9717105>.

sources. In this thesis, “mythical” refers to objects, figures, or symbols that relate to culturally significant folkloric narratives. Her sense of magical realism is a result of her upbringing: by both the matrilineal story-telling traditions of her Irish grandmother and the lifetime of fighting against the restraints placed upon her by class expectations. When biographer Joanna Moorhead writes of the debutante ball at Buckingham Palace in 1935, she describes the rebellious spirit and disdain for aristocracy of her cousin, Leonora Carrington: “Leonora has allowed herself to be reined-in; but this is the final occasion, the last time she ever does as she is told, or what they want her to do”.⁷ Born in 1917 in Lancashire, England to an English industrialist father and an Irish mother, Carrington spent much of her childhood feeling trapped behind the massive stone walls of her family’s Gothic-style mansion known as Crookhey Hall.⁸ However, it was here that Carrington first developed her vision, which Moorhead calls the “launchpad for her imagination, the genesis of a bank of visual and emotional memories that would sustain her direction and her art for the rest of her days.”⁹ Much of her youth would be spent bucking the expectations placed upon her by her upper-class family, developing a defiant streak that would follow her through her entire career. In 1926, Carrington began attending the New Hall girls’ school at the Convent of the Holy Sepulcher in Essex, a Catholic-run school that would become the first in a series of academic institutions that the young artist would attend. Moorhead describes Carrington’s attendance at New Hall: “she was not the first [girl] to disobey the rules...but in a way Leonora’s misdemeanors were worse, because she wasn’t just unruly, she failed to engage...the nuns felt that she was not suited to the school, and would do better elsewhere”.¹⁰ Following her expulsion from New Hall, Carrington would attend another Catholic school at the convent of St. Mary’s Ascot run by the sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her short attendance here,

⁷ Joanna Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington* (London: Virago, 2019), 23.

⁸ Joanna Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces* (Princeton University Press, 2023) 13-15.

⁹ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 13.

¹⁰ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 47.

from 1930 to 1932, would leave her with a lasting memory and a lifelong disliking of the headmistress, Mother Ignatius: “She once said, in front of the whole school when I accidentally put on shoes that didn’t match: ‘Leonora Carrington. Desperate to be different’”.¹¹ While Carrington wasn’t explicitly expelled from St. Mary’s Ascot, it was clear that this environment did not mesh well with her personality and strong sense of individuality. At both schools, religion, specifically Catholicism and all its various rites and rituals, were a part of daily life and would be ingrained in her visual language.

At 15, Carrington would leave St Mary’s Ascot and “formal education” for a finishing school in Florence that catered to upper-class young women. This move was coordinated by her parents who believed the experience would refine her and “hone her into a good bet for a ‘suitable’ marriage.”¹² For the teenage artist, Florence would become a major catalyst in her artistic development. While Carrington would only attend the Italian finishing school for a year, exposure to Renaissance materials inspired her later stylistic and compositional choices. Following her stay in Florence, she would very briefly spend time at finishing school in Paris in 1933 before being expelled and spending several months with family friends. By 1935, Carrington had returned to England and would attend the aforementioned debutante ball in London which she would refer to as a “cattle market...[and] epitomized everything she had come to loathe about the society she found herself: snobbery, fixed expectations, lack of spontaneity, sexism.”¹³ Despite the unpleasantness of this high-society tradition, her attendance also gave her the opportunity to witness the unlocked potential of life in London. In 1936, Carrington would attend the International Surrealist Exhibition at New Burlington Galleries and subsequently attended the Ozenfant Academy of Fine Arts, a small art school run by Amédée Ozenfant

¹¹ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 48.

¹² Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 49.

¹³ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 58.

that emphasized a close Master-pupil relationship akin to Renaissance studios and art as “living fossilized.”¹⁴

Carrington and German Surrealist Max Ernst first met in 1937 in the home of architect Erno Goldfinger. Ernst was significantly older at forty-six and was extremely far outside of the ideals the Carringtons had held for a future spouse for their daughter. Ernst and Carrington would spend the summer of 1937 in Cornwall with fellow artists including photographer Lee Miller, Roland Penrose, and Man Ray.¹⁵ The couple would move to Paris in the fall of the same year and then to a cottage in Saint-Martin-d’Ardèche the following year. Though only at the cottage for two years, Carrington recalls her time in the French countryside as “her happiest time...there was a harmony, a balance to her existence: she and Max have time to be together, and time to be alone...they had time to work on their separate projects – as well as painting, [she] was writing”.¹⁶ By the Fall of 1939, tensions in Europe were worsening by the day. By September, Germany had invaded Poland followed by the invasion of Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and France within a six-month period.¹⁷ Still a German national, Ernst was arrested by the French government as an “enemy alien.” Following his detainment, Carrington’s mental state began to deteriorate and her time at Saint-Martin-d’Ardèche and France as a whole came to an end. She departs from France for Madrid with fellow artist and friend Catherine Yarrow in the summer of 1940.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the move to Spain only led to a mental breakdown that would result in her six-month institutionalization in Santander where she experienced drug-induced seizures caused by Cardaziol, a medication used in convulsive shock therapy.¹⁹ Her experiences in the asylum would inspire her most famous literary creation, *Down Below*. Carrington would leave Santander for Madrid

¹⁴ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 63.

¹⁵ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 71.

¹⁶ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 105.

¹⁷ “Chronology of World War II,” *Current History* 8, no. 46 (1945): 493,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/45306711>.

¹⁸ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 115.

¹⁹ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 117.

with another institutionalization planned by her father, this time in South Africa. Rather than submit to another traumatic hospitalization, she escaped to New York, and subsequently to Mexico with the help of Mexican poet Renato Leduc whom she would wed for a brief period of time in a marriage of convenience.²⁰

The horrors of World War II, including the bombing of London in August of 1940, the extension of Hitler's domain to the Aegean and Mediterranean seas and the establishment of the Axis Powers (Germany, Russia, and Italy), resulted in the scattering of Surrealists across multiple countries. Some relocated to the United States, while another group settled in Mexico. According to art historian Susan Aberth, Mexico drew the attention of the Surrealists because the country had established a policy that afforded European war refugees with asylum and eventual citizenship. The mass emigration of surrealists to Mexico became a turning point for artists like Carrington who thrived by developing her own unique style of occultism along with other female artists such as Remedios Varo and Kati Horna. Her syncretic approach to various mythos rejects a stringent adherence to any single doctrine. Blending Western alchemy, Celtic mythology, medieval magical symbols, and hermetic tradition, Carrington's visual language developed further as she began to experience Mexico's Indigenous and folk practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scope of this thesis is multi-disciplinary using feminist approaches to art history, domesticity, and cooking, as well as the history of Surrealism and its involvement in the occult. The sources reviewed here include scholarship on Carrington, both art historical and feminist, studies on the cultural history of alchemy, esoteric studies, and the occult, and feminist discussions about the kitchen and female domestic work. While Carrington scholarship is already extensive, the focus on the kitchen as a ritual laboratory for transformation needs continued exploration. Kitchens and domestic spaces play a large part in Carrington's work and, in most cases of analysis, comes secondary to surrealist

²⁰ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 129-128.

context or occult influences. Additionally, her works have not been studied as a part of sustained art-historical lineage. Aberth briefly discusses some Renaissance qualities of *The House Opposite*, but this can be researched extensively with consideration of Carrington's schooling in Florence.

This review will discuss biographical information, gender politics within the Surrealist community, Carrington's personal connection to occultism, and occult imagery. Additionally, feminist critique on domesticity and These topics will assist in establishing the meaning in Carrington's well of esoteric imagery and their use in selected works. The review will also address how these themes apply to Carrington's domestic spaces in her art. The current state of scholarship on Carrington's work currently looks at her use of occult symbolism but does not place it within study of gender politics.

To date, the most comprehensive works published on the life of Leonora Carrington are *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington* and *Surreal Spaces: The Life and Art of Leonora Carrington*, both written by Carrington's cousin, Joanna Moorhead. Biographic information will be helpful in determining the sources of Carrington's imagery. In *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*, Moorhead names the chapters associating works to a particular time in her life. For instance, chapters two and three, titled "The Portrait of Max Ernst" and "The Lovers," cover from 1937 in London when she first met Ernst to her departure to Paris. This move is a significant turning point for Carrington and her involvement in the Surrealist movement. Moorhead uses a slightly distinctive style in *Surreal Spaces*; in Chapter eleven, titled "Mexico City," the author delves into Carrington's interest in varying beliefs systems. Moorhead, who visited her cousin in Mexico City often, recounts Carrington's personal library, indicating her interest in "the occult, Gnosticism, Kabbalah, tarot, herbalism, and shamanism".²¹ Carrington's works are highly representative of the events or individuals important in her life as well as the state of her mental health throughout her career. These works by Moorhead will help me in connecting works with eras in the artist's life which will help determine what certain

²¹ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 13-15.

imagery may mean as a result. Aberth also writes significantly about Carrington and fuses biographical information with analysis in *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy, and Art*.²² Aberth's analyses delve deeply into the esoteric and mystical symbols within Carrington's work and link the artist's major life events with motifs and themes.

Studies regarding gender politics within the Surrealist community often include Carrington. Art historians such as Sarah Potter, Whitney Chadwick, and Tessel Bauduin discuss the role of female artists in the Surrealist movement, which relegated women to the role of muse. In *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Chadwick looks at the ways selected female artists, Carrington included, bucked the title of muse and femme-enfant. Femme-enfant translates to "woman-child" and is a concept of women as having childlike innocence and adult sexuality. In her book, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Whitney Chadwick calls the title of muse an "albatross around the neck of the woman artist...the muse, an externalized source of creative energy and a personification of the female Other, is a peculiarly male invention".²³ Chadwick goes on to say the idealized 'femme-enfant' or "woman-child" created a roadblock in which their "childlike ingeniousness...grace, charm, and lively imagination" kept them within the realm of the Surrealist movement with little ability to claim success from beyond this community. Carrington rejected this notion entirely and with gusto. In a story recalled by Gloria Orenstein, she and Carrington attend lunch with friend and editor of the Flammarion Press, Henri Parisot. When Parisot refers to his own wife as a "femme-enfant," Carrington rankles at the term: "That's about enough for me! I am leaving. How can you call a woman of a certain age a Woman-child? It is so demeaning!"²⁴

²² Susan L Aberth, *Leonora Carrington : Surrealism, Alchemy, and Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 2010).

²³ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists, and the Surrealist Movement* (Thames & Hudson, 2021) 78.

²⁴ Gloria Orenstein, "Leonora Carrington's Feminist Alchemical Vision and Extrasensory Perception: My Magical Journey of Friendship with Leonora Carrington (1971–2011)," *Studia Hermetica Journal* 1 (2017): 10.

Similarly, Nadia Choucha discusses how the Surrealist vision did not allow for pure creative freedom for female artists and how they attained this through their own magical tradition. Choucha highlights the use of self-image and mystical female archetypes as a way to create active imagery of women and of themselves: “Faced with no strong female roles to emulate, many of the women turned to occultism, which held an attraction because of the powerful female archetypes and mythological goddesses in these systems.”²⁵ Female archetypes as described by Choucha are framed by mythic structures such as the Mother, the Witch/Sorceress, and the Alchemist. Carrington engages with these archetypes as embodied forms of knowledge that are dynamic and overlapping in their roles rather than fixed universal figures. In *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of Andre Breton*, Bauduin covers the infusion of occultism within the Surrealist movement and how this change or adjusted following the mass emigration of artists out of Europe during World War II, particularly by the female artists. This shift in occult interest is particularly important in looking at the work of Carrington as the interest became less cerebral and more personal with touches of ritual found within traditional Mexican households.

Formalist and iconological studies that cover Carrington’s occult symbolism include “A Visual World: Leonora Carrington and the Occult” by Wouter J. Hanegraaf and “Leonora Carrington’s Esoteric symbols and their Sources” by M.E. Warlick. Hanegraaf attempts to decipher the symbolism within Carrington’s art and what role it plays within her oeuvre. Interestingly, Hanegraaf remarks that Carrington was famously against an intellectual analysis of her art: “You’re trying to intellectualize something, desperately, and you’re wasting your time...you’ll never understand by that road...no, it’s a *visual* world.”²⁶ Additionally, Hanegraaf states that Carrington claimed to not plan out her works, instead allowing them to happen, a clear nod to psychic automatism which was so popular within the

²⁵ Nadia Choucha, *Surrealism, and the Occult* (Oxford: Mandrake of Oxford, 2016), 96.

²⁶ Hanegraaff, “A Visual World,” 101.

Surrealist movement. Rather than forcing the connection between Carrington's use of occult symbolism and the various cross-cultural interpretations, Hanegraaff connects Carrington's firsthand experiences to her mystical paintings. Warlick's study seeks to associate the use of esoteric imagery and Carrington's personal magical practices outside of the intellectual Surrealist occultism, comparing her works with talismans or amulets. Additionally, Warlick's analysis looks to "understand more fully Carrington's magical practices within her art and within the context of twentieth century views of the artist as magician."²⁷ Both Hanegraaff and Warlick determine what esoteric literature or hermetic societies Carrington would have been exposed to throughout her career which would help shape her well of occult and alchemical knowledge. Carrington's hermetic pursuits developed as esoteric knowledge became increasingly popular among the Surrealist community around her. Jonathan Eburne describes the artist's diverse mythologies as "a vigorous intellectual genealogy."²⁸ Eburne goes on to establish that Carrington's reading was extensive including the Pre-Columbian myth *Popol Vuh*, Carl Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*, Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, Kurt Seligmann's *Mirror of Magic*, various fairy tales, and the writings of philosophers and esoteric teachers Geroge Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky.²⁹ The diversity of this material allows the viewer to identify multiple pictorial sources rather than establish one over-arching influence or thematic framework, particularly because Carrington did not personally ascribe to any one religious, hermetic or philosophical tradition. As Eburne explains, Carrington resisted the totality of Absolute Knowledge by not adhering to or representing any one set of principles.³⁰

There is much scholarship regarding Carrington and her use of mystical symbolism as well as the feminist messages within her work. There are few sources that analyze Carrington's use of domestic

²⁷ Warlick, "Esoteric Symbols," 58.

²⁸ Jonathan P Eburne and Catriona Mcara, *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant -Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) 143.

²⁹ Eburne and Mcara, 142-143.

³⁰ Eburne and McAra 142.

setting and activity, particularly the kitchen as an alchemical laboratory and site for mystical transmutation. Even fewer sources bridge the gap between spiritual alchemy, domesticity, and Carrington's esoteric visual language. This gap is where this study exists by analyzing two specific works that portray domestic spaces and labor. By placing *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (1975) and *The House Opposite* (1945) within the material feminist discussion, Carrington's works become feminist reclamations of domestic space. Through analysis, these paintings interpret kitchens as alchemical and ritual laboratories, symbols for feminine power and transformation. In this thesis, "female" and "woman" are used as they exist in the binary gender system while "feminine" is defined as the conventional gender construct and gender performance and identity.

The Kitchen in Feminist Discourse

Historically, the domestic sphere was considered an oppressive area that lived under the thumb of the patriarchy, assigning domestic work as "women's work" while simultaneously devaluing it. In her book, *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici looks at how capitalism played a major part in the devaluation of women's work, particularly the important job of supplying the work force: "the separation of production from reproduction created a class of proletarian women who were as dispossessed as men but, unlike their male relatives, in a society that was becoming increasingly monetarized, had almost no access to wages, thus being forced into a condition of chronic poverty, economic dependence, and invisibility as workers."³¹ Federici also notes that certain tasks, such as sewing or cooking, would be deemed "'domestic work' or 'housekeeping'...[and] was worthless even when done for the market" while the same work done by men would be considered "productive."³²

Later, Second Wave feminism would inadvertently devalue the kitchen through the encouragement of women to do more in the public realm. Stovall, Baker-Sperry, and Dallinger

³¹ Silvia Federici, *Caliban, and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004) 75.

³² Federici 92.

critically assess the feminist discourse of Betty Friedan who “defined the ‘feminist’ as she who did not identify as homemaker or was uncomfortable with full-time domesticity.”³³ As women began to reject being relegated to role of homemaker, participation in domestic and kitchen activities were rejected as well. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan would refer to the home as “a comfortable concentration camp” and argues that “there is something about the housewife state itself that is dangerous...[the women] who grow up wanting to be ‘just a housewife’ are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps.”³⁴ While I consider the statement a touch hyperbolic, Friedan’s concern with the female identity and the increasing passivity in both men and women is fair. Her assessment shows that women in the home need to develop autonomy and achieve a “core of self” to fulfill their own emotional needs rather than depend on fulfillment strictly through marriage and motherhood, which breeds passivity and puts the emotional burden on her husband and children. However, Friedan frames work in the home and kitchen as “endless, monotonous, [and] unrewarding...[and] does not require adult capabilities.”³⁵

The main issue with Friedan’s critiques is the scope of people it affects. The curse that befalls the homemaker is applicable to only middle to upper-class straight white women. It does not include working or single mothers, women in lower socioeconomic classes, or women of other races or sexualities. Intersectional author and social critic bell hooks looks at the value in domestic work as an act of resistance and individuality through the eyes of Black women in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*:

By learning housework, children and adults accept responsibility for ordering their material reality. They learn to appreciate and care for their surroundings...Girl children, though usually compelled to do housework, are usually taught to see it as demeaning and degrading...had they

³³ Holly A. Stovall, Lori Baker-Sperry, and Judith M. Dallinger, “A New Discourse on the Kitchen: Feminism and Environmental Education,” *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 31, no. 1 (February 24, 2015): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2015.11>.

³⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 325, <https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminars/tcentury/FeminineMystique.pdf>.

³⁵ Friedan 327.

been taught to value housework, they might approach all work differently. They might see work as an affirmation of one's identity rather than a negation...they learn to re-think their attitudes towards work, especially service work. They learn discipline begins with careful performance of all tasks, especially those deemed 'menial' in this culture.³⁶

Using hook's discussion on domestic ritual, kitchen work and food preparation becomes important in establishing identity and turns the kitchen into a space for empowerment. It is important in the development of personhood and discipline into adulthood. Similarly, Audre Lorde discusses the need to find pleasure in our work outside of the oppressive for-profit system, asserting that "such a system robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment."³⁷ In this instance, Lorde uses the term "erotic" as "an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives."³⁸ Lorde encourages us to find erotic value and creative power in domestic work.

There is also a strong connection between food and identity. According to Elisabeth L'orange Furst in "Cooking and Femininity," "through the food we eat, we confirm who we are and who we are not."³⁹ Food and food preparation reveals a good deal about who we are, whether it be culturally, socioeconomically, or ideologically. Furst asserts that women have become the default kitchen worker because cooking has become so deeply intertwined with the feminine identity and looks at the potential fear experienced in the gender neutralization of kitchen tasks. This assessment establishes both external and internal oppressive forces, both societal and personal issues with one's own gender identity.

The kitchen can be a place of feminine power and ritual, particularly when looking at the history of midwives and traditional healers who tended to people within domestic spaces. In *Witches*,

³⁶ Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984; repr., London: Pluto Press, 2000), 103.

³⁷ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (S.L.: Penguin Books, 1984), 55.

³⁸ Lorde 55.

³⁹ Elisabeth L'orange Furst, "Cooking and Femininity," *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, no. 3 (May 1997): 441–49, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-5395\(97\)00027-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-5395(97)00027-7).

Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers, Ehrenreich and English admit that “women have been autonomous with healer...cultivating healing herbs and exchanging secrets of their uses...traveling home to home.”⁴⁰ The healers and midwives of the Middle Ages engaged in early family planning practices which were seen as a threat to the status quo of women as responsible for labor reproduction. Additionally, the midwife and wise woman used an empirical method in their treatments in which “she relied on her sense rather than on faith or doctrine, she believed in trial and error, cause and effect.”⁴¹ The wise woman would create herbal remedies in her kitchen which then became her ritual healing space. This was threatening to the Catholic Church which acted as the prevailing medical experts for royals and aristocracy. Creating potions, tinctures, and oils in her kitchen became a subversive act, particularly when providing women with treatments that could induce miscarriage or inhibit a pregnancy from occurring.

Looking again at the discourse of Stovall, Baker-Sperry, and Dallinger, the modern kitchen and cooking have the potential to become a place for environmental and political activism. In their article, they state that feminism and cooking are not opposing forces, but rather “when women cook with traditional and local foods and do so with other members of the household, it is a *feminist act* and a necessary one.”⁴² Their focus on maintaining traditions through cooking establishes the importance of embodied knowledge and creativity through culinary exploration that hearkens back to the medical traditions of wise women and midwives.

Historical Context of Alchemy

The interest in alchemy spans centuries and was of particular interest to the Surrealist community. In “Alchemy and Alchemists”, John Read describes alchemy is the “chemistry of the

⁴⁰ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives & Nurses : A History of Women Healers*, 3 (United States: The Feminist Press At CUNY, 2010).

⁴¹ Ehrenreich and English 14.

⁴² Stovall, Baker-Sperry, and Dallinger 126.

Middle Ages”; an experiment in attempting to turn base metals into gold.⁴³ Read goes on to explain that alchemy developed into a philosophical system, creating a “complex and indefinite mixture of chemistry, astrology, philosophy, occultism, magic, and other ingredients.”⁴⁴ Alchemy became representative of transmutation as well as a way to explain how the universe functioned. The connection between alchemy and hermetic tradition came out of medieval literature which often referred to the Hellenistic figure, Hermes as well as Toth, the Egyptian equivalent. According to Read, the study of alchemy by East Asian philosophers became divided into two categories: exoteric (metallurgic) and esoteric, which dealt with the “‘souls’ or ‘essences’” of certain metals and their identification with parts of the body.⁴⁵ Read cites Chinese alchemist Pai P’u Tzu who applied Taoist beliefs to his treatises and attributing “life-giving” qualities to metals such as gold and cinnabar. Similarly, Read explains that certain substances have associations to aspects of a human being as well as the natural elements. The *tria prima*, or three “hypostatical principles” which alchemists used as a basis for medieval medicine, connects sulfur with fire and soul, mercury with air and spirit, and salt with earth/water and body.⁴⁶

The concept of the Philosopher’s Stone developed as well as the four stages of the alchemical process. Believed to be the source of true wisdom, the Philosopher’s Stone is represented as an egg-shaped object such as an ovular distillation vessel. According to Nadia Choucha, the stone is shown alongside opposites: “it is commonly symbolized by the androgyne, half-male, half-female, depicted with an egg and/or sun and moon.”⁴⁷ The focus is then pulled into a series of opposites: destruction/creation, man/woman, black/white, life/death. In Surrealist art, the egg becomes a symbol

⁴³ John Read, “Alchemy and Alchemists,” *Folklore* 44, no. 3 (September 1993): 251–78, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1256428>.

⁴⁴ Read 251.

⁴⁵ Read 253.

⁴⁶ Read 262.

⁴⁷ Nadia Choucha, *Surrealism, and the Occult* (Oxford: Mandrake of Oxford, 2016), 91.

for “regeneration and rebirth” while also representing “both magic and female creative power.”⁴⁸

According to Venetia Newall in “Easter Eggs: Symbols of Life and Renewal,” eggs are an important symbol in many belief systems: “They represent life and fertility and are symbolic of creation and resurrection. They appear on practically every major occasion in human life...they have been used in magic spells and in foretelling the future, in love potions and medicine...and there is the subconscious belief that the egg is the bearer of strength and the seed of life.”⁴⁹

The process is broken down into stages related to color and transformation: *nigredo* (the blackening), *albedo* (the whitening), *citrinitas* (the yellowing), and *rubedo* (the reddening). The language of the alchemical process includes several stages that relate to food preparation and consumption including digestion, distillation, fermentation, and incineration.⁵⁰ In “Aesthetics and Alchemy in the Contemporary Kitchen” by Joanne Molina, alchemy has been related to the process of preparing food for centuries.⁵¹ According to Molina, “any food that is not eaten in its raw, natural state requires the alteration of its molecular structure by a cook, as in roasting of goat (fire), the boiling of herbs (water), or the curing of ham (air and salt).”⁵² Cooking becomes a process of transmutation using similar stages of process. Additionally, the alchemical process was often performed in kitchens or using everyday kitchen utensils. In *The Dictionary of Alchemy*, Mark Haeffner states that Chinese alchemists would use traditional kitchen equipment such as a *tsao* (stove) and a *ting* (cooking cauldron).⁵³

⁴⁸ Gražina Subelytė et al., *Surrealism and Magic : Enchanted Modernity* (Munich ; London ; New York: Prestel, 2022) 238.

⁴⁹ Venetia Newall, “Easter Eggs: Symbols of Life and Renewal,” *Folklore* 95, no. 1 (January 1984): 21–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.1984.9716293>.

⁵⁰ Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* (Prabhat Prakashan, 2021).

⁵¹ Joanna Molina, “Aesthetics and Alchemy in the Contemporary Kitchen,” *Gastronomica* 10, no. 1 (2010): 145–48, <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2010.10.1.145>.

⁵² Molina 145.

⁵³ Mark Haeffner, *Dictionary of Alchemy* (Aeon Books, 2004) 21.

The cauldron or crucible in particular acts as important symbol as it seen in both alchemy and our traditional imagery of witches and magic. In an 1891 article in *Science*, the author describes the process of alchemy in powerful terms:

To a degree, man would become a creator, and a semblance of omnipotence would be placed in the hands of mortals, not merely by linking himself with the powers of natures and clothing himself with their immeasurable might, but by subduing these forces and compelling them to surrender their secrets and do his bidding. By torture nature could be taught to obey, and become the slave of her mortal child, and the crucible became the instrument and symbol of power.⁵⁴

The cauldron represents the power and potential of transformation, giving the alchemist the ability to manipulate matter and constitute change. The cauldron in witchcraft is also immensely powerful, acting as a symbol of transformation and feminine power. According to Joanna Pearson, the cauldron appears in several mythologies including the cauldron of Cerridwen which bestows knowledge and wisdom and Dagda's cauldron of "rejuvenation and inspiration."⁵⁵ In modern mysticism, the cauldron represents fertility, nature, and the "womb of the Mother Goddess," thereby also symbolizing birth/rebirth and transformation.⁵⁶ In both instances, the vessel used is one of transmutation and rebirth as well as the potential for vast knowledge and power.

ANALYSIS

The House Opposite

The motifs Carrington has selected are highly representative of the alchemical process and transformation. The most prominent item in the scene is the bubbling cauldron in the right panel. The cauldron/crucible acts as the place of transformation in alchemy; in this scene three women attending to the simmering potion within. Chadwick describes the scene as "figures...caught in a moment of metamorphosis."⁵⁷ This can be seen very clearly in in several instances such as the figure descending

⁵⁴ "Alchemy." *Science* 18, no. 447 (1891): 113–14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1768043>.

⁵⁵ Joanne Pearson, *A Popular Dictionary of Paganism* (Routledge, 2013), 32.

⁵⁶ Pearson 32.

⁵⁷ Whitney Chadwick, "Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness," *Woman's Art*

through the floorboards and the horse shaped shadow behind the central figure indicating “her participation in more than one realm of being.”⁵⁸ This can also indicate the house itself has become an alchemical vessel, acting like the crucible in disintegrating the figures that occupy it. The *nigredo* stage is one of transformation or of “solution and dissolution...where liquid becomes spirit” and is most often represented by the color black.⁵⁹ Additionally, the *albedo* phase, or the “renewal through cleansing and purification” is often represented by the color white.⁶⁰ Carrington uses these two colors prominently throughout the scene, particularly in the kitchen, or the alchemical laboratory, where the floor is rendered as a black and white checkerboard. *Albedo* is also represented here through light and fire; the fire sparks beneath the cauldron and moonlight pours in through the skylight in the upper left chamber to illuminate the transformation occurring as the white-haired woman dematerializes through the floor.

Carrington also includes a symbol that resembles the golden alchemical egg in the scene, which is a motif used in several other works such as *The Giantess* (1947) (Fig. 4) and *AB EO QOD* (1956) (Fig. 5). According to Haeffner, the alchemical egg represents the opus or ultimate creation through transformation: “The egg is an archetypal symbol of unity, of growth, of nature’s miraculous hatching of chicks from seemingly inanimate matter, which needs only warmth to accomplish and bring to perfection.”⁶¹ Chadwick also states that within Surrealist art, the motif of the egg is often used: “pagan emblem of creation, and the rejuvenation of spring, symbol of Resurrection, alchemical vessel of transformation, the egg has always symbolized creation; it is the source of life and, by extension, the source of all art.”⁶² The object held up by the entering tree woman may indicate the potential of opus,

Journal 7, no. 1 (1986): 41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358235>.

⁵⁸ Chadwick 41.

⁵⁹ Mark Haeffner, *Dictionary of Alchemy* (Aeon Books, 2004) 21.

⁶⁰ Haeffner 22.

⁶¹ Haeffner 85.

⁶² Chadwick 223.

or final culmination and resulting ultimate knowledge, of the ritual conducted when looking at it through an alchemical symbolism only.

Eggs play an even larger role in this painting through medium. Carrington's decision to use egg tempera for this painting is deliberate. The artist wanted to emphasize techniques and media new or unfamiliar to her: "What I needed was technique. I didn't want ideas. Each one of us has those. Technique, however, is something that is learned. That is why I went about acquiring the recipes for painting. For me, it was very important."⁶³ According to Aberth, Carrington's interest tempera stemmed from the desire to create "jewel-like tonalities", however the connection between producing egg tempera paint and cooking made the medium that much more attractive to the artist.⁶⁴ The process of making tempera begins with mixing powdered pigments with egg yolk then thinning it with water or acetic acid to make it spreadable.⁶⁵ One of the difficulties when dealing with tempera is the fact that the eggs dry very quickly, which means working with small batches of paint and repeating the process of creating usable medium and not being able to easily blend colors together. However, the quick-drying qualities of tempera also lend to its ability to be easily layered in thin coats until the desired tonality is reached. The result of the transparent layers of paint is a luminous effect. Roger Fry describes the use of tempera in Early Renaissance art versus modern usage of oil: "Everyone must be familiar with the peculiar beauty of the skies in early Italian art, the exquisite pearly luminosity they display near the horizon...the secret lay simply in the use of tempera; for while such an effect in oil would almost inevitably be chalky and cold, it may easily be rendered in tempera with perfect mellowness and purity."⁶⁶

⁶³ Aberth, *Surrealism, Alchemy, and Art*, 66.

⁶⁴ Aberth, *Surrealism, Alchemy, and Art*, 66.

⁶⁵

⁶⁶ Fry 176.

Like in the painting *Grandmother Moorhead*, Carrington fills the space with the tools and symbols most common in alchemy and cooking. The most obvious object is the cauldron which acts as the alchemical crucible. Aberth describes the cauldron as a “symbol of fertility and abundance, mystic transformations both alchemical and magical.”⁶⁷ The same green of the potion is repeated in the pitcher, its shape like that of an alembic which is a vessel used for the distillation of liquids. The potion is also repeated in the bowl on the table as the central woman is in the process of consuming the concoction. Around the cauldron, Carrington shows a particular grouping of figures: a formation of three women in the kitchen area, surrounding the ritual cauldron. Three witches around a cauldron evokes imagery from *Macbeth* as seen in a lithograph by August Jean-Baptiste Meurice called *The Three Sorceresses* (1841) (Fig.6). While the witches in *Macbeth* are portrayed as frightening malevolent crones with the ability to predict and affect fate, Carrington’s witches are communing around the cauldron. One is gently stirring the concoction while another dips a finger ready to give it a taste. The last plucks at an herb or plant to add to the recipe. They are not represented as ghastly witches but rather very graceful and slender, reminiscent of Mannerist works like Parmigianino’s *Madonna with the Long Neck* (1535-40) (Fig.7). The quantity of women in the kitchen is also significant. In Christianity, three is a holy number representing Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The wisemen who come to distribute gifts to the Christ child also come in three. In Greek mythology, the Fates are shown in threes engaged in the spinning of thread of fate, another domestic activity turned mystical. A representation such as this can be seen in Jan Muller’s print *The Three Fates: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos* (1589) (Fig.8). Like Carrington’s kitchen inhabitants, these figures are actively engaged in the spinning, measuring and cutting of the thread of life.⁶⁸ Additionally, three is a number

⁶⁷ Susan L Aberth, *Leonora Carrington : Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, 75 (London: Lund Humphries, 2010).

⁶⁸ Tessa Murdoch, “Spinning the Thread of Life: The Three Fates, Time and Eternity,” in *Burning Bright: Essays in Honour of David Bindman*, ed. Diana Dethloff, Kim Sloan, and Caroline Elam (UCL Press, 2015) 48.

significant in Paganism and goddess worship in which the triple goddess represents the three stages of a woman's life: maiden, mother and crone. Representing the cycle of life, the triple goddess in contemporary paganism is a feminist symbol and a means for women to view what is divine and magical about themselves and the world around them through veneration of the three major seasons in a woman's life.⁶⁹

In the *House Opposite*, Carrington's major tool of subversion would be through religious imagery, symbolism, and spatial organization. As previously mentioned, Carrington was raised by English Irish parents in a Catholic household and attended two Catholic schools prior to attending finishing school in Florence. According to Moorhead, religious rites were a part of daily life at the schools, both of which ran out of convents and lead by nuns. At both institutions, students attended daily mass, Benediction twice weekly, and nightly prayers in the chapel.⁷⁰ The Catholic school experience would appear explicitly in two of Carrington's paintings: *The Hour of the Angelus* (1949) (Fig. 9) and *Nunscape at Manzanillo* (Fig. 10) (1956). The former shows schoolchildren playing games and sports next to a bell tower while being watched by dark sinister figures looking beyond the walls of the courtyard. The title refers to "The Angelus," a prayer "traditionally recited three times a day in honour of the Virgin Mary."⁷¹ The latter shows a ship full of ghostly nuns sailing through even ghostlier tropical Mexican seas as the title would indicate. While *The House Opposite* does not use imagery of nuns or schoolchildren, Carrington infuses Catholic imagery throughout.

While looking at the painting's spatial organization and architectural structuring, there are several ideas that could have inspired Carrington in her composition. First is the architecture found in convents or monasteries. Having spent time at two convents and a year in Florence, a young Leonora

⁶⁹ Wendy Griffin, "The Embodied Goddess: Feminist Witchcraft and Female Divinity," *Sociology of Religion* 56, no. 1 (1995): 40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712037>.

⁷⁰ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 13-15.

⁷¹ Sotheby's, Pauline Karpidas: The London Collection Evening Auction, September 17th, 2025, lot 31.

would have become familiar with the interiors of these religious structures. While there are not specific records of Carrington visiting the Convent of San Marco in Florence, it has been well-documented that Carrington revered Renaissance artists and was interested in the work of Fra Angelico per an anecdote in which she accidentally purchased a reproduced painting she was led to believe was an original by a waiter in Sicily.⁷² Both the Convent of San Marco and the frescoes within by Fra Angelico can be looked at to see how convent architecture was utilized by Carrington in *The House Opposite*. When looking at images of the Convent of San Marco and of convents or monasteries, the cloister is the most distinctive architectural feature. In monastic architecture, the cloister is “typically, a square courtyard surrounded by a covered walkway with a central space enriched by the presence of greenery or fountains.”⁷³ The covered walkway would often feature a series of repeated arches called an arcade. When looking at the interior features of *The House Opposite*, each of the doorways between rooms is topped with an arch. While not organized as an arcade, the motif of the arch is replicated here in the house. Additionally, the green space of the cloister is seen in the central chamber through the spectral green outdoor scene. In his description of monastic architecture, John Treat defines the green space of the cloister to be “both the heart of [the monks’] earthly encampment and also a realized piece of the kingdom for which they fought...a foretaste of paradise”, equating being outdoors to experiencing parts of heaven on earth.⁷⁴ Treat goes on to define the function of the space as a place for contemplation in nature, “holy leisure that opens the self to the contemplation of God in reading and mental prayer.”⁷⁵ Could the central dreamlike chamber in the scene function as the courtyard of the Carrington’s cloister? It is possible, but what could that mean for the figures in the image? The room is rife with foliage: a

⁷² Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 57.

⁷³ Luigi Maffei et al., “The Role of Cloisters in Historical Cities,” *Resourceedings* 2, no. 3 (November 12, 2019): 114–18, <https://doi.org/10.21625/resourceedings.v2i3.634>.

⁷⁴ John D. Treat, “Assertions of Monastic Identity and Power in the Cloister and Nave of St. Gall,” *The Ozark Historical Review* 42, no. 4 (2013): 4-5.

⁷⁵ Treat 5-6.

young girl sits in front of a ghostly forest, a vegetal spirit floats into the room, and a rocking horse sits among it all. This would align with the idyllic qualities found in a cloister in which nuns or monks could contemplate divinity. Above the forest, a figure sits up in bed as though awakening from a dream. The white rocking horse is a repeated motif in Carrington's works, showing up in *Portrait of Max Ernst* (1936) (Fig.11) and *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)* (1938) (Fig.12) as a potential symbol of the Celtic goddess Epona and a totemic representation of Carrington's "animal self...[and] her love of freedom."⁷⁶ The vegetal spirit could be a divine figure infiltrating the reclined figure's dream. Through Carrington's interest in Celtic and Irish mythology and storytelling, the deity could be read as Danu, "the mother of all things" in Celtic myth, a Mother Earth figure associated with motherhood, fertility, and prosperity.⁷⁷ However, this is a loose interpretation; the identification of this plant deity is not mentioned in the other literature but Carrington's known infusion of Celtic mystical symbolism is well known and is then a dependable starting point for identifying this figure. This central chamber then could certainly function as a place in which the sleeping figure contemplates, particularly their dreams or their subconscious as presented in the spectral scene.

Carrington also uses a hierarchy of space that could be hinting at the spatial organization of convents and monasteries. In *The House Opposite*, the two largest chambers with the most activity are the "dining space" or central panel with the large table, and the kitchen or laboratory. When looking at the architectural plans for various monasteries, there is a clear hierarchy of space, and therefore a hierarchy of usage. Using the plan for San Marco as the example (Fig.13), following the cloisters, the refectories are the largest part of the living areas for the inhabitants of the convent. Like the arcades of the cloisters, the refectory of San Marco is a very long hall framed by arching barrel vaults.

⁷⁶ Aberth 33.

⁷⁷ George Townshend, "Irish Mythology," *The Sewanee Review* 23, no. 4 (1915): 4562, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27532846>.

In *Surreal Spaces*, Aberth briefly mentions Carrington was directly influenced by artists such as Sassetta, Matteo di Giovanni, Francesco di Giorgio, and Fra Angelico in the spatial organization of *The House Opposite*.⁷⁸ A careful look at the works of these artists can help assess how Carrington was influenced by Renaissance compositions. The multi-chambered layout of *The House Opposite* hints at classical depth. In *Saint Francis Abandons His Father* (1437-1444) (Fig.14) by Sassetta or *Saint Augustine's Vision of Saints Jerome and John the Baptist* (1430-1495) (Fig.15) by Matteo di Giovanni, Carrington's use of chambers within chambers. Annunciation scenes in particular use the setting of domestic space while also integrating this architectural structure that Carrington utilizes. In *Annunciation* (1426) (Fig.16), an altarpiece meant for the Convent of San Domenico, Fra Angelico shows the annunciation of the Virgin in a deep architectural space.⁷⁹ This painting and the fresco of the *Annunciation* at San Marco, a very similar composition, use the arched colonnade to frame the two main figures in the space: the angel Gabriel and the Virgin. The viewer can see depth behind, hinting at more chambers within the setting as well as continued areas behind the Virgin's seat where the vaulted groin vaulted ceiling continue off to the right. An exterior setting to the far left divides the fresco showing a version of the garden of Eden.

The chambers within chambers function as mini stages in both the Renaissance works and Carrington's *House*, highlighting symbolic action across the scene and allowing the viewer to focus on each mini scene before moving on to the next. The composition also follows the Renaissance convention of the continuous narrative in which display multiple moments of a narrative unfolding in one frame with a unified setting. One example of a Renaissance continuous narrative is Jacopo Pontormo's *Joseph in Egypt* (1518) (Fig.17). The painting follows Joseph in his purple robes as Pontormo tells his biblical story in five parts including the death of Joseph's father Jacob in the top

⁷⁸ Aberth 69.

⁷⁹ Diane Cole Ahl, "Fra Angelico: A New Chronology for the 1420s," *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 43, no. 4 (1980): 360, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1482053>.

right portion. The staircase that ascends to Jacob's death bed is strikingly similar to the staircase Carrington has placed going from the kitchen to the liminal dreamscape. The upper right quadrant of *The House* also shows a figure in bed as a mystical being ascends a ladder from the kitchen to space. According to Valerie Finklin, the stairs in Pontormo's piece not only enhance the narrative qualities but the serpentine form "[adds] a temporal element to an atemporal medium".⁸⁰ While allowing the viewer to understand there is a large span of time represented in the narrative, the stairs act philosophically by emphasizing the passage of time and inevitability of one's own mortality as seen through the death of Jacob. Another reference to Jacob in Carrington's piece is the inclusion of two different sets of ladders: one coming from the kitchen to the bedchamber in the top right and one leading from the bed chamber to an open window. Because of the odd perspective in Carrington's painting, it is unclear whether the window leads outdoors into the starry night or into the dreamscape of the central panel. Either outcome is indicative of a passing into the spirit realm. In the biblical story of Jacob's ladder, Jacob dreamt of a ladder leading from Earth into heaven on which angels were ascending and descending.⁸¹ The figure in the black robe ascending the staircase could be seen as Carrington, placing herself in the role of Joseph ascending the stairs on his father's deathbed. Ladder imagery appears in several religious texts and psychological theory. In Islam, the ladder is to mean "progression toward perfection" and divine knowledge.⁸² Similarly, occult belief, such as the "rituals of the Eleusinian mysteries and the rites of Mithras" saw climbing up rungs as an ascension from the earth to the divine source.⁸³ The figure in the four-poster bed looks like a frail woman, Carrington envisioned in her later years. The ladder in the room leads beyond into the spiritual realm, awaiting another ancestor. The ladder that leads to the bed

⁸⁰ Valerie Ficklin, "Mannerist Staircases: A Twist in the Tale," *Athamor* 19 (2001): 28.

⁸¹ James Kugel, "The Ladder of Jacob," *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 2 (April 1995): 209–27, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0017816000030303>.

⁸² David G. Alexander, "The Guarded Tablet," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 24 (January 1989): 199–207, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1512880>.

⁸³ Hall 478.

chamber shows a spectral figure at the top. Going back the biblical tale of Jacob's ladder, Jacob recalls a man at the top rung whose face was "carved out of fire."⁸⁴ While the figure on the ladder isn't on fire, it is preternatural, slightly resembling her version of the Sidhe though rendered in a reddish hue rather than glowing white. The figure also seems to either be holding something in its mouth, like a pipe or straw, or it has a proboscis tongue like a hummingbird. Searches for mythos with long-tongued creatures only produce malevolent beings and Carrington has not shown this figure as such. Perhaps it is an instrument like a heraldic trumpet. It could also be a spirit guide, preparing to take the bed-bound figure into the spirit realm as it hovers at the top of the ladder and reaches over the bed.

Carrington's use of light is also very reminiscent of the way Renaissance artist utilized directional light to highlight divinity and establish a hierarchy of meaning. In *The House Opposite*, the light is rendered in a naturalistic manner throughout the scene. The stars above softly glow in the night sky and the interior space has areas of soft light and shadow. However, the upper left chamber features a skylight that allows distinctive beaming rays light into the room. In reference to Renaissance usage of light, the way Carrington has painted the light as striated beams is like portrayals of divine light in several depictions of the Annunciation. Returning to Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* for the Convent of San Domenico, this painting utilizes a very similar convention to display "holy" light. In the upper left corner, a golden ray of light shoots out of the sun depicted, glancing over the wings of the arch angel and extending to where the Virgin sits. According to art historian Millard Meiss, the rays in Annunciation paintings are "in essence symbols of the Holy Spirit, but they are usually conceived as light...windows or other openings are often provided to permit their passage into the chamber of the Virgin...[and] have a natural aspect that symbolizes and explains the miracle."⁸⁵ While Fra Angelico's

⁸⁴ Kugel 210.

⁸⁵ Millard Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings," *The Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (1945): 178, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3047010>.

beams of holy light come from the sun, Carrington's rays come from the moon and starry sky coming from a perforation in the ceiling.

The two major figures in the room include one in a green robe and pink fish-tailed head piece kneeling on the floor and a woman with long white hair, a crown, and blue dress holding a tree branch while a cat rubs against her legs. The image of the blue-dressed woman looks remarkably like the depiction of the Virgin Mary in Fra Angelico's *The Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin* (1424-1434) (Fig.18). Created with tempera on panel, the piece depicts the Virgin laid to rest in the lower panel and her ascent into heaven in the upper. The Virgin in heaven with her blue robes and halo looks quite like Carrington's figure. This would further symbolically code this chamber as an annunciation scene. The inclusion of the tree branch also has similarities to the iconography found in *Our Lady of the Dry Tree* (1462-1465) (Fig.) by Early Netherlandish painter Petrus Christus. This Netherlandish confraternity uses the imagery of the Virgin surrounded by barren tree branches derived from scripture from Ezekiel 12.24: "and all the trees of the country shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, and exalted the low tree: and have dried up the green tree, and have caused the dry tree to flourish."⁸⁶ This scripture also lends to a Fourteenth century allegory in *Le Pèlerinage de l'Âme* which describes the conception of Mary "metaphorically as an act of God, who grafted a branch from the Tree of Life on a barren trunk", the "barren trunk" being likened to St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin.⁸⁷ The painting lived in Germany from its production until 1965 where it was acquired by the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Spain so Carrington's direct exposure to this work would be unlikely. However, many other Virgin cults in Northern Europe use trees in their iconic imagery such as Our Lady of the Oak or Our Lady of the Elm.⁸⁸ Art historian Hugo van der Velden asserts that may have been a case of

⁸⁶ Hugo van der Velden, "Petrus Christus's Our Lady of the Dry Tree," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 60 (1997): 92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/751225>.

⁸⁷ Van der Velden, 92.

⁸⁸ Van der Velden, 98.

religious syncretism in which the pagan worship of trees blended by the Roman Catholic worship of the Virgin Mother:

“Venerated images with provenance comparable to Our Lady of the Dry Tree were very common. Their profusion and popularity are of course explained by the (prevailing) custom of suspending images from trunks or placing them on boughs. Our Lady was, in fact, the usurper of the trees proper. The pagan worship of trees lasted well into the Christian middle ages, and from the fifth to the eleventh centuries there were constant complaints about offerings to trees. These arboreal images of the Virgin were matched by similar ones which had taken over wells and sources, places which were equally suspicious to the early Fathers of the Church.”⁸⁹
The hybrid Catholic-Pagan qualities of this Virgin representation fall within the artist’s

wheelhouse of visual language. Carrington’s use of the tree branch imagery in relation to Virgin cult iconography in this upper left quadrant paired with common Renaissance conventions in Virgin representations including the clothing and the use of holy light from the chamber certainly leads the viewer to see this white-haired figure in blue to be Carrington’s version of the Virgin Mary. However, the artist gives her Virgin a hint of mystical qualities by placing a cat at her feet, affectionately rubbing at her legs. Cats have been long associated with witchcraft as it was believed the Devil would appear to witches in the shape on an animal, most often a cat.⁹⁰ Interestingly, there is a 1612 witch-trial case from Lancashire (the same area in England from which Carrington hails) where the accused claimed Satan appeared to her in the form of a white-spotted cat and was counselled by her pagan grandmother to renounce God and feed the cat her blood, bread, and milk.⁹¹ Could Carrington have heard this tale of the local witch and incorporated her cat into the imagery as a means to subvert the religious imagery? It is very possible; the story could have been passed down through oral tradition as local lore. Another point of interest in this chamber is the star trailing off the hair of the woman descending through the floor. The “holy light” from the skylight leads the viewer’s eye right to a star and the kneeling figure in green stares at it with veneration. It could be the continuous narrative of the star in the sky falling into

⁸⁹ Van der Velden, 98.

⁹⁰ F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, “A Note on the Witch-Familiar in Seventeenth Century England,” *Folklore* 58, no. 2 (June 1947): 285–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.1947.9717854>.

⁹¹ Micklewright 285.

the scene. It could also be a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem, especially when paired with the Virgin Mother and holy light imagery included in the chamber.

In the large lower panel, Carrington continues her subversion of religious rites and beliefs. The large central table acts as both a dining table and an altar with the seated figure as the priestess. As previously mentioned, the imagery of a white horse became a totemic symbol for the artist, having used it in several other paintings and stories. The central figure in the red and blue dress is rendered with hair reminiscent of a horse's mane and her shadow is cast in the shape of a horse on the wall behind her. On the table sits a vessel of liquid, an empty plate, and a bowl of grapes. In Catholicism, the Eucharist is an important religious rite of "sacramental function" in which "participants united with the blood and body of Jesus Christ and, thus, share in his death and resurrection: it adumbrated, reflected and represented the participants' salvation."⁹² It is believe by the Catholic Church that the items used in the Eucharist, namely the wine and the bread or Communion wafer, undergo a transformation called Transubstantiation in which the consecration of the bread and wine by the priest turns them into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. According to religious scholar Patrick Toner, under the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the bread and wine do not just represent the blood of Christ symbolically but transform physically.⁹³ By including her own version of the Eucharist at the altar/table, Carrington emphasizes transformation as well as ritual through consumption. This shows the artist's Catholic background is still deeply important in her visual language while incorporating aspect of self-identity and mystical interests by presiding over this sacred rite as her totemic self. Additionally, when looking at the repeated colors of the grape, the liquid in the pitcher, and the concoction in the cauldron, they are all the same sickly green shade. Are the witches at the cauldron creating wine or alcohol and the large

⁹² Valeriy A Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering : Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2010), 104.

⁹³ Patrick Toner, "Transubstantiation, Essentialism, and Substance," *Religious Studies* 47, no. 2 (July 12, 2010): 218, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0034412510000272>.

transparent cauldron then a distillation vessel? Wine was an important product, not only as a part of the Eucharist, but to Renaissance alchemists as well. While wine itself does not undergo a distillation process to turn grapes into wine, it can be distilled after its fermentation to create other spirits such as brandy or cognac. The alcohol appears in Renaissance era literature as *aqua vitae* and “fifth essence”, well known for its use in medicine and “its supposed power to preserve the human body.”⁹⁴ The distillation process of alcohol became recognized as an alchemical process and created a fork for alchemists, dividing them into medical chemists or philosophical alchemists.⁹⁵ What is the goal of this Eucharist? For Catholics, it is to achieve salvation while communing with God. For Carrington, could she be communing with the spirit realm or with ancestors? The tiny hen-like figures materializing at the bottom of scene look a bit like the reoccurring ghostly creatures Carrington includes in *The Ancestor* (1965). The communion Carrington’s horse priestess seeks could be with her ancestors as she undergoes a very personal transformation.

The production of this painting falls at a momentous time in Carrington’s life. Her son Harold Gabriel Weisz is born on July 14th, 1946. This painting was completed sometime in 1945. The chances of Carrington being pregnant during its production are quite high. Art historian Tere Arq theorizes that the tree-headed figure is a totem for Carrington’s husband Chiki.⁹⁶ This could be so however, as with imagery of the virgin Mary, trees are commonly associated with female figures. According to Irit Ziffer, trees have been often connected to women because “the tree and the female bear fruit, and therefore are conceived as symbols of fertility, abundance and nourishment.”⁹⁷ Interestingly, a tree-headed goddess

⁹⁴ Robert Multhane, “THE SIGNIFICANCE of DISTILLATION in RENAISSANCE MEDICAL CHEMISTRY,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 30, no. 4 (July 1956): 331, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44446463>.

⁹⁵ Multhane 332.

⁹⁶ Tere Arq, “Leonora Carrington in Mexico: The Mirror of the Marvelous” (Annual Stanley and Pearl Goodman Lecture on Latin American Art, December 17, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eF2PlzMfrVo>.

⁹⁷ Irit Ziffer, “Western Asiatic Tree-Goddesses,” *Ägypten Und Levante* 20 (2011): 411, <https://doi.org/10.1553/aeundl20s411>.

appears in Egyptian mythology. The goddesses Nut and Hathor would be rendered as a woman whose lower body becomes a part of the tree's trunk or even as simply as a tree with human arms.⁹⁸ Symbolizing life and protection, the tree goddess would be venerated for their nurturing qualities. Both Nut and Hathor are well known for being mothers: Nut to Isis, Osiris, and Set and Hathor to Horus and Ra. If the tree-headed figure is read as a motherly goddess, the gold sack she carries becomes a symbol of Carrington's impending motherhood. The angelic sleeping face in the center of the golden bag can be read as the tree goddess presenting the priestess with her child. The empty seat at the table potentially awaits the arrival of a new member of the family. Additionally, the tree could be representative of the family tree or the tree of life, handing over the next branch to the awaiting mother. Paired with the annunciation imagery in the chamber above, the left half of the painting becomes a kind of Surrealist birth announcement as Carrington contemplates her impending motherhood. The painting overall reveals Carrington's transformation as a woman, her development from maiden, to mother, to crone as hypothesized through interpretation of the upper left quadrant. Thus, the multiplicity of her feminine identity is revealed as well. Carrington is a priestess, an alchemist, a cook, a mother, a young girl, and a sorceress.

Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen

Thirty years span between the creation of *The House Opposite* and *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen*. In this time, Carrington developed a unique visual language influenced by Mexico's colorful and mystical culture. At this time in the late 1940's, Mexico was a melting pot of cultures and people as well as a particular religious systems: "many were Catholic...by the Roman dogma had become intertwined with the beliefs of the Maya people, the Aztecs and the pagans, belief systems that predated Christianity."⁹⁹ This brand of Catholicism spoke to Carrington whose Celtic ancestors

⁹⁸ Buhl, Marie-Louise. "The Goddesses of the Egyptian Tree Cult." *Journal of near Eastern Studies* 6, no. 2 (April 1947): 96. <https://doi.org/10.1086/370820>.

⁹⁹ Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces* 152.

developed a syncretic version of Catholic ritual themselves that integrated Irish paganism with forced conversion.¹⁰⁰ Carrington developed a close circle of fellow artists including Remedios Varo, Kati Horna, and her future husband Chiki Weisz. Art historian Clare Kunny states that for Carrington and Varo, Mexico became a place that allowed them to “distance [themselves] from the pressures of the highly structured and ultimately male-dominated Surrealist group.”¹⁰¹ The kitchen became a place of experimentation, of cooking, nourishment, witchcraft, and transformation. According to Moorhead, Carrington, Varo, and Horna, known as *las tres europeas*, “the house was fundamental, and much of their life together took place within the kitchen, that hidden domestic space where women’s lives have so often been confined...and yet for this group it was anything but confinement: they made the kitchen into a room where they could be exactly what they wanted to be, a place where they were truly free.”¹⁰² Janet Kaplan wrote that “using cooking as a metaphor for hermetic pursuits [Carrington and Varo] they established an association between women’s traditional roles and magical acts of transformation.”¹⁰³ According to Aberth, the 1950’s marked “deeply hermetic turn with a focus on alchemical processes of distillation and transformation” and Mexican culture would be incorporated in subtle ways as the artist avoided “exoticism and appropriation.”¹⁰⁴

In Carrington’s kitchen, she utilizes alchemical imagery, Celtic mythological symbolism, and Mexican culinary items to create a scene that explores domestic space as ritual space, matrilineal knowledge, and Mexican spiritual syncretism. The previously described alchemical equipment is echoed in Carrington’s work. The athanor, or alchemical furnace, is shown in the back as a large back stove, the top of which narrows into a triangular shape. Fire and sulfur are both represented by a vertex-

¹⁰⁰ Susan Aberth, “The Alchemical Kitchen: At Home with Leonora Carrington,” *Nierika* 1 (January 5, 2012): 11, <https://nierika.iberomex.mx/index.php/nierika/article/view/363>.

¹⁰¹ Clare Kunny, “Leonora Carrington’s Mexican Vision,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 166–79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4104320>.

¹⁰² Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces*, 172.

¹⁰³ Janet A Kaplan, *Remedios Varo : Unexpected Journeys* (New York Abbeville Press Publ, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ Aberth, “The Alchemical Kitchen”, 11.

up triangular shape in alchemical chemistry and symbolism. Beneath the table, Carrington includes a round glass decanter, evoking the imagery found in medieval engravings of large glass distillation vessels. Carrington's use of color is also a very deliberate representation of the colors in alchemical philosophy. Red acts as her main color; the final stage in the alchemical process, *rubedo* represents the successful culmination of all stages and results in the "red elixir" or Philosopher's stone.¹⁰⁵ White appears in both the goose, a possible representation of divine purification, the hoods of several of the humanoid figures, as well as the various heads of garlic. Yellow, the transitional stage between purification and the ultimate elixir, exists in the corn as well as the *maseca* being ground on the *comate* in the front left corner and the tortillas on the alchemical furnace. Black is also present in the furnace, a logical connection as *nigredo* is the act of blackening.

One of the more striking elements of the image is the presence of the stark white goose in the center of the composition. Carrington places the goose along the edge of the sacred ritual circle, the three hooded figures staring raptly at it as though we caught the moment it was conjured. According to Catriona McAra, the giant goose in the center of the scene acts as a matriarchal figure, possibly a representation of her own grandmother, as well as "the fairy-tale preparations, gossip, and yarn-telling long associated with groups of women."¹⁰⁶ Geese and swans have appeared in art across ages and cultures with a connection to ancient cults focusing on "fertility and cultivation divinities."¹⁰⁷ According to historian Edward Armstrong, goose and swan imagery has been associated with the goddess Aphrodite, representing female divinity. Alternatively, Armstrong states that there are instances in which swan and geese also represent or have associations to male figures and symbols, such as the tale of Zeus and Leda in which the Greek god turns himself into a swan, as well as solar

¹⁰⁵ Haeffner 22.

¹⁰⁶ Catriona McAra, *The Medium of Leonora Carrington* (Manchester University Press, 2022) 44.

¹⁰⁷ Edward A. Armstrong, "The Symbolism of the Swan and the Goose," *Folklore* 55, no. 2 (June 1944): 54–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.1944.9717717>.

symbols and sun worship (symbols of male energy).¹⁰⁸ McCara's theory of the use of the giant goose as a nod to fairy-tales and nursery rhymes of Carrington's youth as well as an alchemical reference makes sense as the title refers to matrilineal tradition and the additional inclusion of Celtic mythic imagery. Carrington's cousin and biographer Joanna Moorhead states that "her grandmother's kitchen was the first magical space in her life, the first place where she experienced these interwoven worlds she would forever fit between."¹⁰⁹ Grandmother Moorhead is invoked through title and leads me to believe McCara's theory that the goose comes from her grandmother's story is apt. However, Carrington excelled at layering multiple mythos in one image and, as Whitney Chadwick states, "interpreting too literally results in amusing but futile attempts to determine whether one is confronting the goose to Isis, or the Irish goose of Michaelmas legend or the alchemical goose of Hermogenes...the answer, in many cases, is all of the above."¹¹⁰ In *Jung, Alchemy and Remedios Varo: Cultural Complexes and the Redemptive Power of the Abjected Feminine*, Dennis Pottenger states that imagery of white birds is a symbol of "the whitened soul (that is, a more conscious soul)...the soul in the process of making its way into conscious partnership with the divine."¹¹¹ In the process of alchemy, *albedo* is the process following the blackening of the object in which the impurities are burnt off, a kind of baptism by fire resulting in purification.¹¹² Carrington uses geese and similar birds in several of her works including *The Giantess* in which large white birds fly circles around the giantess as she clutches a gold egg, another alchemical representation. The binary nature of goose mythology, whether intended or not, also connects it to the binaries that are important in alchemy (male/female).

The horned creature to the right of the goose in the composition is a little bit more mysterious than the goose. Horned animals are most often associated with male divinity across multiple cultures.

¹⁰⁸ Armstrong 58.

¹⁰⁹ Moorhead, *Surreal Space*, 33.

¹¹⁰ Hanegraaff 102. Hanegraaff quotes Chadwick's book *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*.

¹¹¹ Dennis Pottenger, *Alchemy, Jung, and Remedios Varo* (Routledge, 2021).

¹¹² Haeffner 22.

The contemporary image of the horned god is derived from a variety of mythical sources: Cernunnos (Gaulish), Herne (Anglo-Saxon), Woden (Norse), and Osiris (Egyptian).¹¹³ The horned figure is also holding a broomstick, a symbol of witchcraft dates to the Middle Ages. Sometimes referred to as a *besom*, the broomstick is used to symbolically “sweep away” negative energies from a ritual space, particularly the hearth area.¹¹⁴ Carrington’s decision to render the figure in black and place it next to the stark white goose represents the binaries of black/white and male/female.

The sacred circle below the ritual table has obvious occult connections. Having an appearance like Kabbalist zodiac circles or even medieval alchemical diagrams, the magic circle Carrington created has a very particular source. In *Reflowering the Goddess*, Gloria Orenstein states that the “series of black strokes would probably not interest the casual viewer...when deciphered they read: ‘The Goddess Dana became and is the Sidhe...the Old Races died-Where did they go?’”¹¹⁵ In this inscription, Carrington includes links to Celtic mythology, naming the Mother Goddess “Dana” as well as the “Sidhe” which are faerie folk in this mythological system. Orenstein goes on to explain that Carrington’s image is “occulted,” or coded through occult symbolism, because “Goddess knowledge is threatening to a patriarchal culture.”¹¹⁶

The selection of vegetal items on the ritual table and sacred circle is also very purposeful. In Scott Cunningham’s *Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs*, a collection of historic and mythic uses for various produce and herbs, garlic has historically been used as a protective object.¹¹⁷ Elementally associated with fire, it would be worn around the neck during the Middle Ages to ward off the plague as well as by sailors to avoid shipwrecks.¹¹⁸ Cabbage is also present on the ritual table, sitting in the

¹¹³ Joanne Pearson, *A Popular Dictionary of Paganism* (Routledge, 2013) 80-81.

¹¹⁴ Michael Streeter, *WITCHCRAFT: A Secret History*. (Quarto, 2020) 134-135.

¹¹⁵ Gloria Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990).

¹¹⁶ Orenstein 10.

¹¹⁷ Scott Cunningham, *Cunningham’s Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* (Woodbury, Mn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2013) 109.

¹¹⁸ Cunningham 109-110.

middle of the assortment. While Cunningham associates cabbage with luck and good fortune in marriage, the way Carrington has shown the cabbage leaves like a large rose shows further connections to alchemy. In a commentary for *Leonora Carrington: A Retrospective Exhibition* in 1976, Carrington explains the views on the common cabbage:

The Cabbage is a rose, the Blue Rose, the Alchemical Rose, the Blue Deer (peyote), and the eating of the God is ancient knowledge...although the properties of the cabbage are somewhat different, it also screams when dragged out of the earth and plunged into boiling water or grease – forgive us, cabbage...the cabbage is still the alchemical Rose, for any being able to see or taste.¹¹⁹

A recurring object in Carrington's works, such as in *Hunt Breakfast* (1956) (Fig. 19) and *Cabbage* (1975) (Fig. 20), she holds the vegetable up as an equivalent to the alchemical rose, a symbol often used in the Rosicrucian model of alchemical metallurgy, a group that “originated in medieval Europe as an outgrowth of alchemical speculation...[and] represented the first European invasion of Buddhist and Brahmin culture.”¹²⁰ Beyond their potential symbolic meanings, the food and cooking activity also lend to Carrington's deliberate titling of the piece. She includes the word “Aromatic” in the title and the activity in this kitchen lends to that affect. Garlic, peppers, and cabbage all have very strong scents when prepared. The figure in the back at the stove stirs a pot which can only be assumed to hold partial contents of the produce on the altar. The space has life through aroma and sense memory, particularly by invoking grandmotherly reflections. A viewer may recall the scents in their own grandmother's or other matriarchal family figure's kitchen.

Produced well after Carrington's move to Mexico, the inclusion of corn in this work is representative of the artist's interest and appreciation in Mexican and Pre-Columbian myth and culture. *Maize* plays an essential part in Maya art which portrays the importance of corn and the associated maize god to the Mayan people. According to Bryan R. Just, the worship of and ritual connected to

¹¹⁹ Aberth 94.

¹²⁰ Hall 391.

corn was not just to ensure agricultural bounty, but “also to suggest that dynastic power recurred as if botanically inevitable; just as agriculture follows recurring cycle life, death, and renewal, the Maya held that dynastic power flowed from interred ancestors to their progeny.”¹²¹ What’s particularly interesting about Carrington’s use of corn imagery is her decision to show the transformative process of whole corn to tortilla. After years of watching my own mother grind her own *maseca*, turn it into *masa*, and manipulate it into tortillas, I can attest to the fact that the act of making and cooking tortillas is its own kind of alchemical process. An activity that would have occurred in the kitchen of any Mexican woman, Carrington uses the everyday task of making tortillas as ritual and transformation. The overall image takes the banality of cooking and transforms it into magic invocation.

When comparing this work with other representations of alchemical processes or ritual, the active participants are starkly different. In medieval illustrations of the process, the alchemist is most often a man. In Northern Renaissance engravings, such as *The Alchemist* (1558) (Fig. 21) by Pieter Breugel the Elder, the figure at work is the male head of the household, foolishly determined in turning lead into gold to save his family. While the identities of the cloaked figures in the image are unknown, Jonathan Eburne is of the opinion that there is an “autobiographical resonance” of these characters.¹²² Found in her other works such as *The Ancestor* (1968) (Fig. 22) and *The Kron Flower* (1986) (Fig. 23), the cloaked figures represent Carrington’s of the “crone...or figures of ancient gynocentric wisdom.”¹²³ By placing the crones as alchemist and conjurer at the ritual table, Carrington reclaims the alchemical process as a feminine experience. The inscription recalling the Mother Goddess and the appearance of Mother Goose gives the painting a matriarchal spirit. By doing so, Carrington both turns a male practice into a feminine practice and a female domestic space into a realm of power.

¹²¹ Bryan R Just, “Mysteries of the Maize God,” *Record of the Art Museum Princeton University* 68 (January 1, 2009): 4.

¹²² Eburne 27.

¹²³ Eburne 42.

The kitchen plays a large part in Carrington's art and personal life. Several scholars, including Orenstein, have had the privilege of meeting Carrington in her Mexico City home and sitting around that very kitchen table she would congregate around with her magical sisterhood. According to Aberth, Carrington found connection between cooking and magic:

Using cooking as a metaphor for hermetic pursuits they established an association between women's traditional roles and magical acts of transformation. [Carrington and Remedios Varo] had both been interested in the occult, stimulated by the Surrealist belief in 'occultation of the Marvelous' and by reading in witchcraft, alchemy, sorcery, Tarot, and magic. They found Mexico a fertile atmosphere where magic was part of daily reality; traveling herb salesmen would set up on street corners with displays of seeds, insects, chameleons, special candles, seashells, and neatly wrapped parcels with such mysterious labels as 'sexual weakness', all used for the practice of witchcraft by the *curanderas* (healers), *brujas* (witches), and *espiritualistas* (spiritualists).¹²⁴

Aberth explains that the culture of Mexico and becoming a mother in 1946 and 1948, which she stated was a "profoundly positive experience", aided Carrington in synthesizing magic with her domestic spaces and activities.¹²⁵

The kitchen as a setting appears in Western art history frequently. Typically, the kitchen is used in genre scenes that represent activities in everyday life. It is shown as a space for women, servants, and a place for the fulfillment of domestic duties. It is often seen as a symbol for the mundane and banality of domestic life and a place of humility. In *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen*, Carrington positions herself within the Western art historical kitchen traditions and recreates the prosaic domesticity through mystical symbolism, matriarchal tradition, and rendering a sensorially alive ritual laboratory. To ascertain how Carrington can do so, a comparison to art historical representations of the kitchen and domestic space must be made.

The Hours of Catherine of Cleves (1440) (Fig.24) is a Gothic style illuminated manuscript that shows domestic scenes in the life of Christ. Commissioned by Catherine of Cleves, the Duchess of

¹²⁴ Aberth 60.

¹²⁵ Aberth 64.

Guelders, this Book of Hours includes additional “Saturday Hours” that were atypical for a common Book of Hours.¹²⁶ In an image occurring on page 151 for the hour of None, the Master of Cleves has rendered a domestic scene in which the holy family engages in daily life. The scene shows Mary nursing the Christ child while Joseph eats his dinner in high backed chair. Both figures sit in front of the hearth in a kitchen that is contemporary to its production. Food is cooking on the hearth in hanging cauldron over the fire and knick-knacks line the walls. Art historian Barbara Lane explains that the image is not a simple view of the holy family enjoying dinner, but rather a display of humility through the Virgin Mother: “the artist has transformed a deceptively simple scene into a symbol of one of Mary’s virtues: in this case humility...[and] her intercessory powers as Mother of Christ, a role which is of course dependent on her freedom from original sin.”¹²⁷ Humility was encouraged as an essential virtue with *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, a 14th century devotional work, placing it higher in importance than virginity: “virginity is a laudable virtue by humility is much more necessary...you can be saved without virginity but not without humility.”¹²⁸

Some of the most well-known representations of kitchens in Western art history come from the Dutch tradition of genre scenes. *Kitchen Piece with Jesus in the House of Martha and Mary in the Background* (1569) (Fig.25) by Joachim Beuckalaer is an excellent example of the kitchen in Dutch genre scenes. In the foreground, the focus is on the abundance of produce, meat, poultry, and kitchen accoutrements. A woman stands in the foreground holding a leg of lamb and a basket of apples, her gaze staring off into the left off the panel. The space has a sense of architectural depth, like what was discussed of Renaissance panels, however the foreground is very densely packed with objects. In the background framed by columns, a scene takes place beyond the young woman’s shoulder. *Kitchen*

¹²⁶ Barbara G Lane, “An Immaculist Cycle in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves,” *Oud-Holland* 87, no. 4 (January 1, 1973): 177–204, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187501773x00182>.

¹²⁷ Lane 195.

¹²⁸ Lane 196, quoting *The Meditations on the Life of Christ*.

Interior (1644) by David Teniers the Younger shows a more spread-out kitchen but the abundance is no less. Poultry cooks on spits in the background while the foreground has unprocessed fish and game ready to prepare. A mother sits in a chair peeling apples for her child. Interestingly, a large elaborately decorated swan pie sits on the table on the left side of the composition. The white bird is a striking element in the image as is Carrington's inclusion of the stark white goose. In both Beuckalaer's and Teniers's images, the scenes are a full of ingredients and prepared food, emphasizing abundance and the enjoyment of the earthly pleasures of food and drink. The movement in the scenes is static. Beuckalaer's woman is standing still, holding her goods to display them. The mother in Teniers's image sits peacefully in the kitchen engaged in the quiet task of peeling apples. There is a slow and quiet calm in both images, a stark difference when compared to the activity in *Grandmother's Kitchen*. In Carrington's scene, the viewer has shown up at the climax of the ritual. There is activity occurring as figures stir pots, grind corn, wield knives, and stare raptly at the conjuration of the goose. The figures in the scene are active participants engaged in

Carrington's kitchen figures in the kitchen have some stylistic similarities to her "ancestor" figures, such as seen in *The Ancestor*. The large black eyes and white shrouded heads hint towards these kitchen inhabitants being ancestors from the spiritual realm. While representing ancestral figures has always been a part of Carrington's body of work, it is an excellent example of how her visual traditions seamlessly blend with Mexican traditions outlook on death. Mexican writer Octavio Paz describes the Mexican attitudes on death in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*: "the word death is not pronounced in New York, in Paris, in London, because it burns the lips. The Mexican, in contrast, is familiar with death, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it; it is one of his toys and his most steadfast love."¹²⁹ According to anthropologist Stanley Brandes, this view of death is inherited from the

¹²⁹ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude : The Other Mexico ; Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude ; Mexico and the United States ; the Philanthropic Ogre* (London: Penguin, 2005) 57-58.

experiences of Pre-Columbian ancestors who “met death of their own volition for the sake of their gods.”¹³⁰ The reverence Mexicans have for their ancestors is most evident in the celebration of the Day of the Dead. A syncretic version of the Roman Catholic celebration of All Saints Day and All Souls Day, the Day of the Dead encourages the veneration of deceased friends and family through the assembly of *ofrendas* at grave sites and traditional offerings of bread, candy, fruit, and flowers. Food and cooking traditional meals are an important part of this celebration, particularly indulging in the foods the deceased most enjoyed. Brandes goes on to say that the presentation of food at the grave site undergoes a transformation of symbolic significance. He states that “an orange resting on the kitchen table is there for the taking...put the same orange on an altar, and it obtains an aura of sacredness.”¹³¹ Food undergoing a spiritual process is a consistent theme in Catholicism, alchemy and across the two selected Carrington works. Interestingly, Brandes mentions that, while the food is left for the ancestors to enjoy, there is no belief that they partake in consuming the offerings. Rather, since the ancestor is only spirit, they can only enjoy the aroma of the food left on the ofrenda: “the souls are [made] of wind and cloud, without either teeth or palate...it is believed that the souls carry off only the essence [that is, aroma] of these items so situated.”¹³² The titling of Carrington’s painting feels tied to this belief of

Carrington’s kitchen becomes a magical space rather than one of banality. The synthesis for her Celtic mythological roots, appreciation for Mexican culture and spirituality, and art historical layers creates a ritual sphere and a hybrid esoteric space. By turning the kitchen into a magical and alchemical workshop, Carrington subverts the patriarchal associations of the kitchen and turns cooking and domestic activity into ritual. She uses her Surrealist point of view to enchant the kitchen rather than destabilize it. Rather than reject domesticity and kitchen activities, she embraces them and the

¹³⁰ Stanley Brandes, “Is There a Mexican View of Death?,” *Ethos* 31, no. 1 (March 2003): 134, <https://doi.org/10.1525/eth.2003.31.1.127>.

¹³¹ Brandes, “Sugar, Colonialism, and Death”, 276.

¹³² Brandes, “Sugar, Colonialism, and Death”, 276.

historical art tradition of kitchen scenes while also turning them into symbolic activity and ritual.

Grandmother's Kitchen reinvents domestic space into a space of matrilineal and ancestral tradition through the artist's syncretic beliefs tied directly through the act of ritualistic cooking.

Reconsidering the Kitchen: Carrington and Art Historical Lineage

The two paintings in Carrington's body of work represent the development of her pictorial language and share several motifs in common with art historical representations of the kitchen. Food preparation and associated imagery such as fires and stoves are present in both the selected works and art historical kitchens. Domestic items are carefully selected and depicted to hold symbolic weight. Tables full of produce not only represent abundance but are ritual tools and offerings. Grapes become a Eucharist and a ladder is a path to the spiritual realm. Carrington utilizes the compositional aspects of both Renaissance religious scenes and Dutch genre paintings by creating depth of architectural space, establishing chambers of activity that act as parts of the overall narrative. *The House Opposite* utilizes similar spatial conventions and interior chambers to create mini stages on which the viewer can focus. These paintings also display productive environments in which several acts are occurring, evoking the same qualities from Medieval and Renaissance domestic scenes such as the Dutch genre examples and the Annunciation examples previously mentioned. Carrington shows figures engaged in everyday labor: women cooking, eating, preparing *masa* to be turned into tortillas. The sense of labor and activity in these scenes are reflective of traditional domestic spaces, but Carrington reinterprets their significance through symbolism and mythological or religious reference.

While Carrington uses art historical motifs and conventions in her paintings, she can transform them to display agency and power in domestic rituals. While traditional genre scenes, particularly the Dutch scenes of 1500's, are meant to be observational of daily life and are often moralizing through allegory, Carrington focuses on domesticity as a site for alchemical ritual and spiritual transformation.

The banality of domestic life, however pleasant and abundant the Dutch genre scenes show them to be, is replaced with the sublime of mystical practice. Carrington reframes the genre scene through her female figures as well. In the prior examples, women in genre scenes are passive and are subordinated to domestic roles. While Carrington's women are engaged in cooking and food preparation, they do so as bearers of esoteric wisdom engaged in culinary acts as ritual. Additionally, animals are used in genre scenes as background figures or as part of the bountiful display of food. Carrington's creatures are steeped with magical and alchemical symbolism. Horses, cats, hens, and geese make up her menagerie of co-workers, familiars, and deities.

When *The House Opposite* and *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* are viewed together, it becomes clear that Carrington is not only modernizing the historical domestic or genre scene but rather thoroughly redeveloping it. By pulling from Renaissance compositional ideas and narrative movement while also subverting patriarchal religious traditions into her own ritual, Carrington reframes the kitchen as a realm of spiritual transformation and matrilineal tradition. Both kitchens are similar laboratories where identity and matter are transformed through the domestic ritual of cooking and food preparation. They fall within historical visual tradition while also dismantling them, replacing them with alchemical and mystical ethos that values creativity and change. In Carrington's hands, the domestic realm is put front and center in her visionary language and is demonstrated as a sublime place where the everyday is transformed.

CONCLUSION

The last decade has seen a renewed interest in Carrington's work and female Surrealists in general. These include many of the sources used in this thesis as well as several exhibitions such as *Dream Weaver* hosted by the Brandeis University and the current program at the Palazzo Reale in Milan. These showcases highlight Carrington's dreamlike scenes and "the unbridled imagination of a

woman on a profound journey to unravel the world’s mysteries.”¹³³ The revived enthusiasm also allows viewers to explore Carrington’s mystical kitchen and her portrayals of spiritual transformation. Carrington’s use domesticity and the kitchen as a site of feminist alchemical processes and mystical change can be assessed through today’s lens. This artist uses domestic space as an alchemical laboratory, dissolving the historically patriarchal implications of the kitchen by portraying the dissolution of matter and spirit, labor, and feminine embodied knowledge, and the sacred and mundane. This thesis has established the historical and cultural context of alchemical symbolism as well as Carrington biographical background to determine how the selected works fit within the artist’s oeuvre. Feminist theory regarding the kitchen, domestic labor, and feminist reclamation was determined to place this thesis within the current discourse. A formal analysis of *Grandmother Moorhead’s Aromatic Kitchen* and *The House Opposite* was conducted to determine Carrington’s use of color, composition, and iconography. Lastly, this thesis synthesized the analyses and placed them within Carrington’s evolution as a feminist alchemical artist and spiritual visionary.

Historically, the kitchen existed within a patriarchal framework associated with forced and unpaid domestic labor, highlighting confinement and the invisibility of the contributions of homemakers to family structures and society. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Freidan uses the kitchen as a setting of oppression and crises of self: “the tragedy was, nobody ever looked us in the eye and said you have to decide what you want to do with your life, besides being your husband’s wife and children’s mother”¹³⁴ Surrealist theory often placed female participants in a passive role, developing the idealized version of “*femme-enfante*” which would “inevitably and more than any other single factor, work to exclude women artists from the possibility of a profound personal identification with

¹³³ “Leonora Carrington: Dream Weaver.” *Brandeis.edu*, 2025, www.brandeis.edu/rose/exhibitions/2025/leonora-carrington.html.

¹³⁴ Friedan 85.

the theoretical side of Surrealism”¹³⁵. However, more modern thinking of the kitchen places cooking and domestic activity back into the hands of all as a means of creative expression and love through nourishment. This is particularly true when theory departs from the middle to upper-class white demographic of Second-wave feminism and the oppression of the homemaker and focuses more on the varying experiences of other genders, races, and classes. Carrington’s mystical vision subverts the established hierarchies within domestic spaces and transforms the kitchen from a place of unpaid and underappreciated work to sites of creative power by embracing kitchen activities and domestic rituals. The world created by Carrington takes the alchemical laboratory, often represented as spaces and activities for men, and places it within the kitchen which adds feminine energy to the lab and alchemical experimentation to the domestic space. By blending the domains, domestic labor becomes sacred ritual and a process for creation and transformation. In Luce Irigaray’s feminist critique, she determines the Freudian concepts of gender are anchored by masculinity: “sexuality is never defined with respect to any sex but masculine...the ‘feminine’ is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly”¹³⁶. In these works, Carrington shows scenes with only women and female-animal or female-spirit hybrid creatures. Speaking through the medium of the kitchen, they exist as individuals within the scene outside of their associations with men and patriarchal norms. Carrington’s imagery becomes a new visual language to define feminism and domestic femininity outside of traditional gender discourse.

The imagery also becomes representative of an alchemical process visualized by Carrington’s oeuvre. As previously discussed, alchemy has four primary stages: *nigredo*, *albedo*, *citrinitas* and *rubedo* or dissolution, purification, yellowing and illumination¹³⁷. When looking at the two paintings at distinct stages within Carrington’s life, both artistically/stylistically and personally, we can see that they

¹³⁵ Chadwick 35.

¹³⁶ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 69 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

¹³⁷ Haeffner 60.

mirror the alchemical process through representations of domestic interiors. As the *nigredo* stage, *The House Opposite*, through chaotic organization, fragmented structure and psychic dematerialization, represents female multiplicity and displays the disorder as potential for spiritual transformation rather than hysteria. Like Irigaray's concepts of female sexual multiplicity, Carrington creates a multiplicity of female identity by rendering women of different life stages, various stages of psychic or spiritual change and engaged in domestic work as ritual. *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* behaves as the *rubedo* stage, using harmonious composition and deliberate color choices to represent the final stage of enlightenment and discovery. In this kitchen, we can see unification of spirit and the physical world through conjuration where magic becomes matter, and goddesses occupy the space. The activity we see in Grandmother's kitchen is the ultimate female creativity. In her 1975 feminist essay, "The Laugh of Medusa", Helene Cixous, using the example of writing, explains that creativity is an incredibly subversive act: "that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never her turn to speak – this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space than can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures"¹³⁸. This creativity is also seen as comparable to the nourishment of the body, equating giving through creativity with "good mother's milk"¹³⁹. This places the kitchen as a site for subversive creativity, one that places value on nourishment and feminine labor. When looking at the works together, we can see Carrington develops her own feminine opus centered on matrilineal knowledge and cooking as creation with the kitchen as her alchemical laboratory. The oppressive space of the quiet homemaker becomes a vibrant spiritual realm for the female alchemist. Carrington's kitchen becomes the vessel in which her visual language becomes ingredients in the alchemical

¹³⁸ Hélène Cixous, *Laugh of the Medusa.*, 879 (The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

¹³⁹ Cixous 881.

process. In broader feminist art history, Carrington positions herself alongside feminist artists of later generations who also show the kitchen and cooking ritualistically, such as Judy Chicago and Martha Rossler. Her works anticipate the discourse found in feminist art of the 1970's.

This analysis shows the kitchen as a liminal space – existing both in the spiritual world and in the material domestic sphere. Looking at Carrington's kitchen scenes through this analytical lens offers the suggestion to do so with other women Surrealist artists through similar frameworks. The works of Remedios Varo and Dorothea Tanning, who both utilized interior domestic spaces and incorporated a feminine consciousness in their work, could be examined in a similar fashion. We can begin to analyze how other Surrealists used esoteric and alchemical iconography in a feminist way as well, determining what visual language they have developed and how this differs or matches that of Carrington. We can also have a continued conversation about alchemy's role as a metaphor for feminine creativity in art and literature. The combination of visual analysis, feminist discourse, and alchemical hermeneutics allows for a thorough exploration of the selected works. An interdisciplinary methodology suited this research and can aid in exploring further art historical research, particularly continuing this study through the Surrealist movement. This thesis is limited to two case studies; further study can be expanded to include more of Carrington's paintings as well as her writings. Carrington's narratives are rife with mystical and alchemical symbolism and continued exploration through the same theoretical framework would help gain a better understanding of Carrington's oeuvre.

The kitchen as shown by Carrington is both a crucible for transformation and the cosmos where women engaged in domestic ritual floats between the material and psychic realms. Carrington's dreamlike scenes present themselves as sites of transformation and the search for ultimate wisdom, portrayed by feminist creativity and embodied knowledge. Her exploration of mythology and interest in esoteric texts and imagery adds to her already vast visual vocabulary and lends to the fantastical scenes, bewitching the viewer with chimerical figures and ethereal goddess amid spiritual metamorphosis. The

re-enchanting of the domestic space adds magic to the everyday where mysticism and female labor join. The kitchen reclaimed as a feminist laboratory stands as a symbol of resilience and sacredness in everyday domesticity.

FIGURES



Fig. 1 *The House Opposite*, Leonora Carrington, 1945, tempera on panel, 33 x 82 cm, Private Collection.



Fig. 2 *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen*, Leonora Carrington, 1975, oil on canvas, 79 x 124.5 cm, Charles B. Goddard Center for Visual Performing Arts, Ardmore OK.



Fig. 3 *Self Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)*, Leonora Carrington, 1937-38, oil on canvas, 65 x 81.2 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 4 *The Giantess (The Guardian of the Egg)*, Leonora Carrington, 1947, tempera on wood, Private Collection.

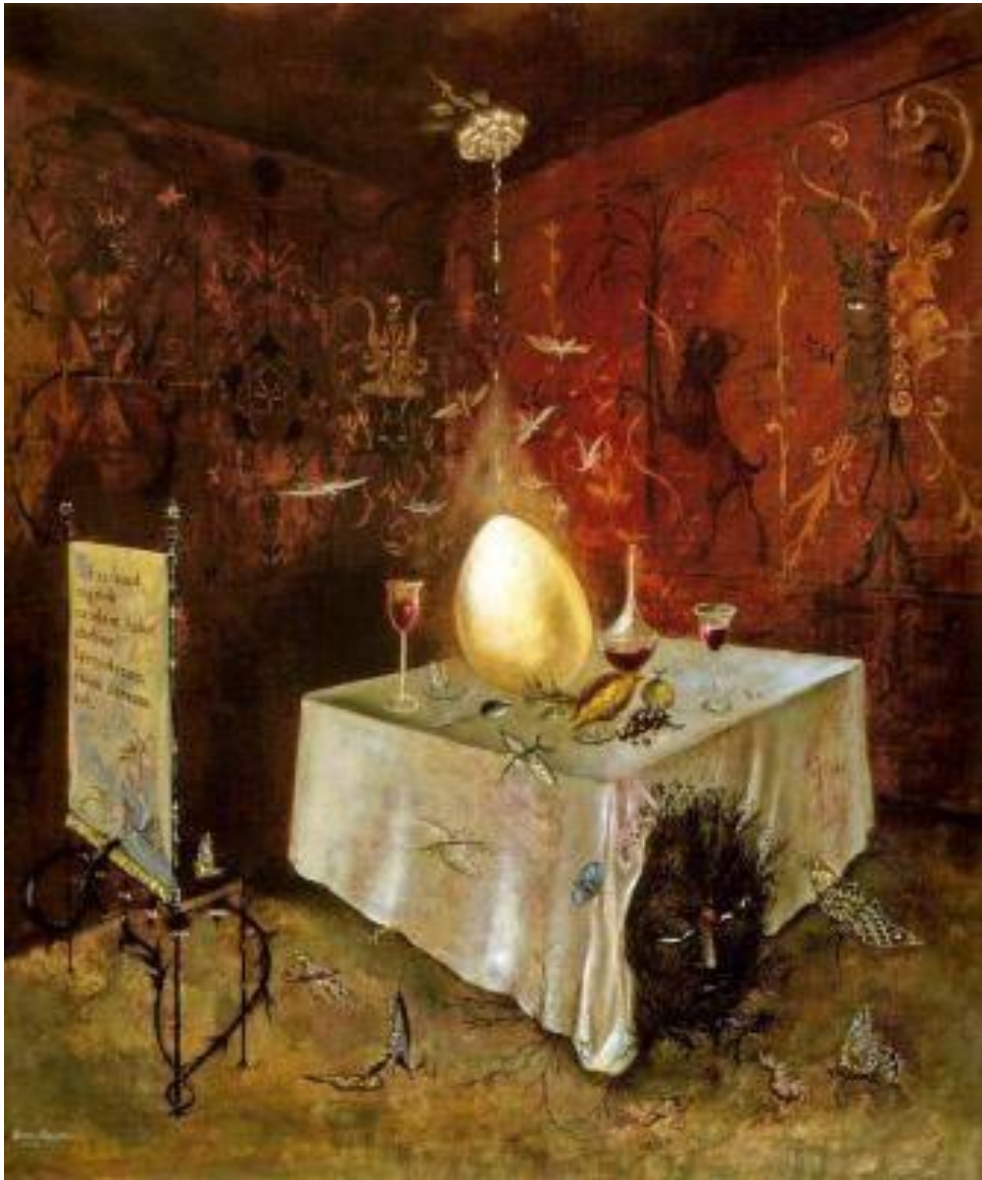


Fig. 5 *AB EO QOD*, Leonora Carrington, 1956, oil on canvas, 71 x 61 cm, Private Collection.



Fig. 6 *The Three Sorceresses*, August Jean-Baptiste Meurice, 1841, lithograph, Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University.



Fig. 7 *The Madonna with the Long Neck*, Parmagianino, 1535-40, oil on wood panel, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 8 *The Three Fates: Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos*, Jan Muller, 1589, engraving, the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 9 *The Hour of the Angelus*, Leonora Carrington, 1949, tempera on panel, 60.2 x 91.1 cm, Private Collection



Fig. 10 *Nunscape at Manzanillo*, Leonora Carrington, 1956, oil on canvas, 93.98 x 114.3cm, Private Collection.



Fig. 11 *Portrait of Max Ernst*, Leonora Carrington, 1939, oil on canvas, 50.3 x 26.80cm, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

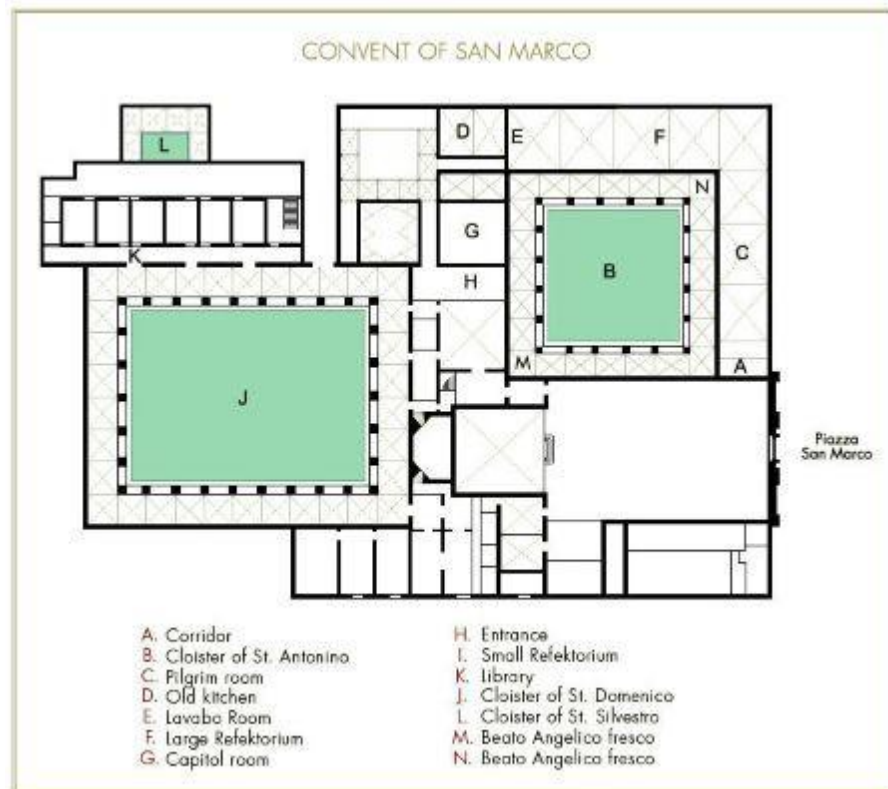


Fig. 12 Layout of the Convent of San Marco, original design by Michelozzo, 12th-18th century, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 13 *Saint Francis Renounces his Earthly Father*, Sassetta, 1437-44, egg tempera on panel, 87.5 x 52.4cm, the National Gallery, London, England.



Fig. 14 *Saint Augustine's vision of Saints Jerome and John the Baptist*, Matteo di Giovanni, 1479, egg tempera on panel, 37.6 x 66.1cm, The Art Institute of Chicago.



Fig. 15 *The Annunciation*, Fra Angelico, 1440-1445, fresco, Convent of San Marco, Florence.



Fig. 16 *Joseph with Jacob in Egypt*, Pontormo, 1494-1556, oil on wood, the National Gallery, London, England.



Fig. 17 *The Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin*, Fra Angelico, 1424-1434, tempera with oil glazes on panel, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA.



Fig. 18 *Our Lady of the Barren Tree*, Petrus Christus, 1480, oil on panel, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain.



Fig. 19 *Hunt Breakfast*, Leonora Carrington, 1956, oil on canvas, 40.5 x 49.5 cm, Private Collection.



Fig. 20 *Cabbage*, Leonora Carrington, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 91.5 x 61 cm, Private Collection.



Fig. 21 *The Alchemist*, Pieter Breugel the Elder, 1558, engraving, 33.5 x 44.9 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 22 *The Ancestor*, Leonora Carrington, 1968, oil on canvas, 65 x 40 cm, Private collection.



Fig. 23 *Kron Flower*, Leonora Carrington, 1987, tempera on panel, 61 x 101 cm, Private Collection.



Fig. 24 *The Hours of Catherine Cleves: page 151*, the Master of Catherine of Cleves, 1440, painted vellum, the Morgan Library and Museum, New York City.



Fig. 25 *Kitchen Piece with Jesus in the House of Martha and Mary in the background*, Joachim Beuckelaer, 1569, oil on panel, the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

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